

**TRUTH, MYTH AND POLITICS
IN ANCIENT INDIA**

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To
MY MOTHER

Foreword

The political life and thought of ancient India is more than a subject of mere academic study, for as one travels in India and watches the scene of local, state and central politics one still seems to hear echoes of the words of the *Arthaśāstra*, of the Epics, and of the many inscriptions of ancient and medieval Indian kings which form one of our main sources for obtaining an understanding of their polity. Moreover, the numerous works on the subject which have appeared since the Second World War, written both by Indian and non-Indian scholars, are evidence enough of the significance of the subject, and have triumphantly vindicated India from the accusation, often to be found in earlier writings, that she was only interested in the spiritual and abstract and had no political ideas worthy of the name. Classical Indian political thought now forms a regular part of the curriculum of many universities, and its study provides interesting points for comparison with the thought and institutions of classical and medieval Europe, and of traditional China.

Many writers have already written on early Indian politics, and remarkably original new books are still appearing on this subject. I think particularly of the works of John Spellman and Carl Drekmeier, and of the forthcoming stylistic analysis of the *Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra* by Thomas Trautmann—all Americans, incidentally. The study by Dr. Ian Mabbett, written from a different point of view from that of the other scholars I have mentioned, forms another important contribution to the study of the subject, distinguished by sound scholarship and down-to-earth common sense. Dr. Mabbett deserves the thanks of scholars for emphasizing in his study of the subject how little we really know with certainty—probably no ancient civilization has been subjected to so many sweeping generalizations on the basis of one or two citations from comparatively unimportant texts as has ancient India.

I believe that Dr. Mabbett's work also deserves special attention, because it is one of the first works on ancient India to be produced by a teacher in an Australian university. It gives further evidence of the growing Australian interest in India, which, I believe, will within a few years result in very important works in the field of Indology, which are not the work of migrants and expatriates, like Dr. Mabbett and myself, but are written by native Australians who have learnt Sanskrit and Indian history in Australia itself.

Acknowledgements

These studies are based on work done for a doctoral dissertation at Oxford, and I would like to acknowledge the considerable help given at that time by Professor T. Burrow, my supervisor, and by Dr. Raghavan Iyer. In the course of the subsequent re-writing, Professor A.L. Basham of the Australian National University has taken some trouble reading the manuscript and making detailed comments, and I am most grateful for his assistance. Needless to say, none of these is in any way responsible for any of the imperfections of the finished work.

I have also had the benefit of correspondence with Dr. T.R. Trautmann of the University of Michigan about his recent important work on the *Arthaśāstra*, and I would like to acknowledge the permission granted to me by the Journal of the American Oriental Society to reproduce substantially in the greater part of Appendix 2 my article on "The Date of the *Arthaśāstra*" in volume 84 (1964), pp. 162–169.

Finally I would like to thank the publishers for their help in the preparation of this work for publication.

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INTRODUCTION

THE APPROACH TO ANCIENT HISTORY

The study of ancient history, particularly of ancient Asian history, has a special character that seems to mark it off sharply from the study of more recent times. To Western students, familiar with the much-trodden paths, the banal certitudes, the utterly spurious semblance of concreteness and absoluteness in the factual foundations of what is commonly taught as history at school, the nebulous pre-chronicle past comes at first as a disconcerting novelty, sometimes challenging and stimulating, sometimes demoralising and frustrating.

Thus there seems to be a gulf between the world of palm-leaf manuscripts and battered stone inscriptions and the world of government archives and collections of documents, a gulf between two worlds that seem to contain two styles of life—one strange, remote, dominated by religion, inaccessible to our empathy, the other practical and reassuringly familiar—and to require two distinct approaches from the student—one full of speculation and guess-work about the facts of a society whose behaviour was governed by motivations almost unknowable to us, the other a matter of constructing elegant varieties of interpretation upon a foundation of secure and documented dates, names and places. Nor does this discontinuity characterize the undergraduate's work alone. To a degree it characterizes historical scholarship.

Lack of Secure Facts

The differences between ancient and modern historiography are of course very real. Vastly more detail is known about modern times than about ancient. More questions, different sorts of questions, can be raised and answered. But still the differences are essentially of degree. The basic purposes and techniques of historical enquiry should be the same. Too often, they are not.

The danger here is the danger of a false expectation—that historical facts, once discovered, shall be secure and can be taken for granted. Modern history seems to meet this expectation in a way that ancient history certainly does not. All too many of the elementary facts about early kingdoms and empires are either unknown or subject to raging debate.

If our aim is that, for the purposes of history, secure facts should be the starting-point rather than the end of the enquiry, there are two ways of dealing with the shortage and nebulousness of the evidence on ancient history that confronts us. The first is to take all the scraps of evidence that we have quite literally, to imagine them to describe the things we wish to see described, and to invent the facts we want for ourselves when they are otherwise unobtainable. For example, there used to be such as would say that the legend of Rama's chariot, which magically flew up in the air, is clear proof that the ancient Indians had aeroplanes. This is an obvious case of failure to apply regular historical scepticism—the scepticism that is the basic stock-in-trade of history as a scholarly discipline—to the source-material. The same sort of failure, in less obvious forms, still occasionally persists.

Alternatively, we may give up the struggle to obtain sure knowledge on the ground that the evidence is lacking or is altogether unreliable. It is very commonly remarked how notable is the absence of strictly historical records in Sanskrit literature. There is nothing like the dynastic histories composed in China. The idea of history seems to be missing : the wise men of India lived in eternity, and what pertained only to the here and now escaped their notice. Only what contained an enduring truth seemed to be worth saying. Stories of the past served to justify and legitimize the present ; it was the moral that constituted their essential truth, and the improbability of their content, which mingled the plausible with the fantastic, was irrelevant.

Various texts move from the narrative to the didactic and back again without any sense of discontinuity, because story and lesson were alike meant to edify ; all was moral, all was to demonstrate the order of the universe, and to record events for their own sake was not a recognized motive. Some of the most important materials for the study of government are constituted by the lawbooks and treatises on kingship ; but these, specific though they are, specify only what people should do, and vouchsafe no accredited indication of what people actually did. Can we, in these circumstances, hope for historical reconstruction at all ? Theory is easy enough to read about ; fact, one might be forgiven for thinking, is unobtainable.

Difficulty in Historical Reconstruction

However, both these opposite approaches to the material are wrong. The sources may be regarded neither as fact nor as fiction, but as pointers to the situation in which they were created and to the conditions affecting the ideas that they express. It is the method of history not to accept certain

privileged sources as reliable statements of fact, but to take into account the context of each reference, the purposes of the author, and the type of source in which it is contained.

Sometimes several different disciplines can be applied to the same enquiry, asking the same question about the same material. For example, several passages in Sanskrit literature have been adduced as evidence of a doctrine of the right of the subjects to kill a bad king. In a typical passage, it is said that a king subject to evil influences is meet to be slain, *vadhya* (Mbh. 12.93.9).

We can ask what this means from the viewpoint of political philosophy, as has been the most frequent approach to such references. We might regard it as a statement of the right to rebellion; or we might attempt to show that the idea of a political right to rebellion is contradictory; or we might stay neutral, pointing out that nothing is said about who is to kill the corrupted king, whether subjects, sons, ministers, generals or neighbouring kings.

Moral Judgments, Not Prescriptions

We can ask what it means from the viewpoint of a linguistic discipline—what do the words actually mean? We could point out that the gerundive form used does not necessarily mean 'is to be slain.' It can mean simply 'worthy of slaying.' It may be a moral judgment, not a prescription at all. Imagine a parallel: 'worthy to have no heirs.' This would not be a doctrine of a right on the part of the subjects to sterilize the queen.

We can ask what it means from the viewpoint of social anthropology, the purpose being to look for whatever consistency there may be between the ideas thrown up by the society in question, to search out the meaning of them as a scheme of shared beliefs. Thus it would be necessary to appeal to the entire context of epics, *sāstras*, *smṛtis* and *purāṇas*, and decide that the scheme of ideas is a moral one where preoccupations with merit, reward, punishment, and so forth are ubiquitous and political doctrines as we understand them largely lacking. *Vadhya* could best be fitted into this scheme as a moral judgment.

We can ask what it means from the viewpoint of history, which is similar to this but involves only the more immediate context. We ask what type of source it is. The *Mahābhārata* is not a treatise on constitutional law. The words we are concerned with are represented as being spoken by a counsellor to a king. The whole context is intended to magnify the virtues of a righteous king. Thus the passage can only be seen as a warning to a king of the evils of taking bad counsel. It is not a Bill of Rights.

The passage is historical evidence of the existence, in at least some

quarters, of an ideal of kingship surrounded by good influences, which may not tell us much but will take its place in a pattern made of hundreds of such inferences. When a pattern is made, it may be possible to reason backwards from the ideas in the sources to the sort of society in which they grew. It is not legitimate to reason forwards from any particular idea to the actual behaviour of people seen as a consequence of having the idea. There is no way whatsoever of discovering the actual behaviour of Indian kings directly from texts which say how they ought to behave. There is a sort of method with the sources which says, in effect: 'How much of this theory was acted on? Probably not all, but we can safely assume that in general kings tried to follow the texts.' This thesis may sometimes coincide with the truth, but there is no telling—it is guess-work.

Residuum of Truth

If we are to discover actual behaviour, we must do it by a more indirect route. The ideas must be some clue to the actual environment, for they could not arise and be widely propagated without having some relevance to what people were doing. But, simply because they are the ideas of people trying to make their own society intelligible to themselves by imposing order on it and postulating purposes for it, they mirror it distortedly. They can be used as historical evidence, by studying the distortions. It is a misunderstanding of history, any history, even events that are documented by dry, precise, 'historical' records, to imagine that it consists of finding the right sources and reading the events from them. It consists of finding any sources that may be relevant, lies though they may all be, and asking why and in what conditions they were written. In the end there will be a residuum of truth. (This is very much what A.L. Basham is appealing for in 'The Literary Sources of Ancient Indian History' in *Studies in Indian History and Culture*, pp. 30–40). If both sides in a battle say their tanks were victorious, we have historical evidence that both sides used tanks. If one side later announces that it will set up fresh training courses for its tank corps, there is some historical indication which side lost the battle.

CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL OUTLINE

Developments in North Indian history during the early period for which inscriptional and literary evidence is to hand are part of a single stream beginning with the Vedic age, though information for these early times is even less positive. Phases may be distinguishable, but the shorter they are, the less sense they make in isolation, and the study of institutions and events of one period needs to trace their evolution back through time. The Aryan tradition began with the distinction between conquerors and conquered and eventually became involved (whatever the causes at work) in an intricate hierarchical form of society. *Ṛta*, the fixed order of things in the Vedas, becomes *dharma*, much the same thing but with implications of law and of duty for groups and individuals. At the heart of Vedic religion is the sacrifice, which as time goes on loses some of its mysticism and gains further the character of social convention.

Polity in Vedic Age

The society of the Vedic Aryans was tribal. Prominent among the tribal names are the Bharatas, Pūrus, Kurus, Anus, Druhyus, Turvaśas and Yadus. Quite a few others are also mentioned including Krivis (perhaps related to the Kūrus), Alinas, Pakthas, Bhalānases, Śivas and Viṣānins. Some other tribes named may not have been Aryans. Gradual eastward progress from the north-west is evident.

The original inhabitants occur in the Vedas as *dasyus* and *dāsas* and as such are not clearly distinguished from demons. Later usage of the stem *dāsa* shows an association with slavery or servitude. A *dāsa* chief is seen following Aryan ways. It therefore appears that the *dasyus* were regarded as enemies but were effectively conquered and began to be assimilated. No doubt in various significant ways the assimilation was mutual.

Vedic tribes were often at war, against the *dasyus* or each other. Divodasa fights the *dāsa* Śambara. The Bharatas fight Viśvāmitra's confederacy of ten tribes in a historic battle. Thereafter they are engaged in war against three other tribes who may not be Aryan.

Many kings are mentioned (*rājas*, a term most conveniently rendered here in this way), and lines of descent through several generations are

traceable in a number of cases. There is no evidence that kings were landowners. They were often wealthy. The term *rājanya* (royal) is applied to families who appear to have constituted a noble class.

The function of the *rāja* was protection, which involved 'defence or war. Many references show that he had a particular duty to punish theft in its various forms. He was also expected to support priests and those in need of help, such as widows. These are provisions that find an echo in much later times. The law that was to be administered, whether or not formal or institutionalised, was relatively simple and did not, so far as the evidence shows, involve any property transactions. Debt was well known. In one hymn a gambler who has lost everything becomes a slave.

The part played by religion needs to be noticed. By late Vedic times sacrifices had become a great science. Sacrifices performed by kings were often very expensive and involved the offices of up to seven priests. Their performance was a sign of wealth and therefore glory, and it is significant that a king's glory was reflected by the particular sacrifice that he performed rather than anything else. It was the sacrifice that was held to establish his special majesty. This shows a mystic element in kingship, which exercised a great deal of power on the minds of men rather than practical works.

The features of the period may be summarised. Socially, it saw the seeds of the class and caste system sown. The class of *rājas* or *kṣatriyas*, terms which came to be used interchangeably, appeared. Religion was built round sacrifice and dominated the culture of the people; priests were credited with special powers and exercised great influence. People thought of themselves rather as Aryans than as members of classes, and as members of family and tribe groups. Public affairs were conducted by *rājas* and *rājanyas* with priestly advice. There is no evidence of conflict between priests and warriors as classes, or between either of these and the rest. Social categorization is retrospective: people were not at first very much concerned with it.

Features of Post-Vedic Polity

Following the Vedic period tribes turned into settled countries. Buddhist sources, though circuitously handed down by an imperfect tradition, speak for the period beginning in the sixth century B.C. when the rise of Magadha began. Tribal war turned into territorial conquest. King Bimbisāra married the sister of Prasenajit of neighbouring Kośala, and also the daughter of the Licchavi chief. He conquered Anga, and had wide diplomatic relations. He is especially remembered for fostering Buddhism. His son Ajātaśatru, reputedly a parricide, went to war against

Prasenajit, and against the Mallakas, Licchavis and many tribes. It is possible to see here the beginnings of imperial ambitions.

Many settled kingdoms are mentioned including Gandhāra, Kamboja, Kāśī and Agra. According to later *smṛtis* which distinguished between areas such as *Āryavarta* and *Brahmavarta* the central part of northern India was the abode of piety.

Classes are now more clearly defined, and so is kingship. Bimbisāra and Ajātaśatru of Magadha, and Prasenajit and Vidūḍabha (in Pali) of Kośala, are seen acting on their own responsibility. In some smaller countries government was in the hands of *kṣatriya* families which had expanded so as to constitute either an oligarchy within a tribe or an autonomous sub-tribe possibly still owing allegiance to its neighbours. This is the natural interpretation of the *gaṇas* ('republics') which are a notable feature of the period, though it has alternatively been held that they were a reaction against kinship. Some of these have been mentioned. Others are the Śākyas (the Buddha's own), Koliyas, Bhaggas and Moriyas. Applied to members of these, the term *rāja* means chief or *kṣatriya* indifferently. Special attention will be given to these communities in a later chapter.

Foreign contacts appear to have been increasing. For the late Vedic period evidence is very indirect. Information of acquaintance with Mesopotamia needs to be wrung from resemblances between certain words in Sanskrit and Hebrew, denoting things, including peacocks, that may have been traded, and from engravings on the obelisk of Shalmaneser dating from 860 B.C. More concrete evidence arises later. Herodotus records the inclusion of an Indian contingent at the battle of Plataea in the fifth century B.C. Ctesias, who was in Persia during the last part of that century, wrote about India. It is likely that there was a good deal of trade. The pattern of the Indian economy had taken a settled shape.

The pattern of monarchical administration seems also to be set. Bimbisāra is seen dealing with appointments, consultations, and public works, and undertakes tours. From this time onwards touring is an important part of government, offering the most direct sort of contact with subjects. The kingdom is less a tribal group, more a country. The king however is still *rāja* and *kṣatriya*, and his claims are rooted in heredity and family seniority as well as conquest. His writ does not extend to the ordering of all local affairs, for we see villagers in the *Jātakas* carrying out various tasks of local government.

An important feature of this period is the rise of Jainism and, more particularly, Buddhism. The moral standard of Buddhism was *dhamma*,

righteousness, which was true for all men and did not depend on social position. It offered a standard of conduct that was universal, and rejected ritual asceticism and *varṇa* (class) discrimination. Buddhism was fostered by many kings, including, notably, Aśoka in later times, in the performance of their function of supporting religion.

Embryo of Magadhan Imperialism

This period then is characterized by the appearance of settled kingdoms and the embryo of Magadhan imperialism, by the emergence of *gaṇas*, and the rise of Buddhism which was from then on an important strand in Indian culture. Royal administration evolved, but was far from totalitarian.

The Mauryan empire was immediately preceded by the invasion of Alexander and the rule in the north-east of the Nanda dynasty. Nine of these Nandas are referred to, all brothers according to Buddhist sources, which also claim, without great plausibility, that they started as a robber band and won their empire by terrorising the countryside. That such a claim could be made is suggestive of fragmentation and confusion prevailing at the time. Tradition has it that the first Nanda was a *śūdra* barber and a murderer. Kingship was not rigidly identified in practice with the *kṣatriya* estate. The first Nanda was called Mahapadma or Ugrasena, the last, by the Greeks, Xandrames, or Agrammes which would correspond to the derivative Augrasainya. This king according to Curtius had a large army. His empire extended up to the Beas. He was oppressive and unpopular. This being so, his empire may not have been so cohesive that a square confrontation with Alexander would have seen a different issue to the campaign, as has been claimed. This however is a matter for conjecture.

Alexander crossed the Indus in 326 B.C. and met with a great deal of success by engaging the native rulers one at a time. Opponents named by the Greeks include Omphis and Porus, which would correspond to Ambhi and Paurava. Towards the end the Indian kingdoms drew together against the invader, but it is clear that the north-west was fragmented into several small tribes and kingdoms without unifying factors other than the threat from outside. It was not long before Alexander retired, partly impelled by the impatience of his troops to get back, and left garrisons in the conquered territory, which was divided into seven satrapies. Five of these were in India proper, of which some were left under native rulers. The Greeks had put down no deep roots, and in 317 B.C. Eudamus, the last general, left India.

The Mauryan Polity

Chandragupta Maurya had dealings with Alexander and may have learned various things from the Greek example. His accession cannot be exactly dated but was during or shortly after Alexander's invasion. According to traditions of varying reliability, he was low-born or one of the *kṣatriya Moriyas*. He commanded a large empire, possibly similar in size to Aśoka's, which can be roughly defined, with the exception of Kalinga. He is associated with a *brāhmaṇa* minister Kauṭilya, who figures in one later play as the power behind the throne, and to whom is traditionally attributed the authorship of the *Arthaśāstra*. A Greek ambassador Megasthenes recorded what he saw in India, the record being preserved only in fragments at second or third hand. It appears that the empire was divided into provinces under governors, and that district administration was under officers called by Megasthenes *agronomoi*. There was apparently a large and well-paid standing army under a committee for war with thirty members. The king spent all day in court and seeing his ambassadors. He consulted with a council that appointed officers, many of them spies. City administration was, according to him, under six committees, one of them responsible for the entertainment and supervision of foreigners. It is probable that most of this is accurate but fanciful intrusions cast doubt on the reliability of extant records of Megasthenes' account.

Chandragupta was succeeded by Bindusāra, who, in the absence of contrary evidence, may well be taken to have added to the empire or at least maintained it. After him Aśoka, who acceded in about 268 B.C.,¹ leaves positive information about his rule in the form of inscriptions. These are valuable not only for their content but for their situation, which indicates an empire covering the whole of the north and extending as far south and west as Mysore and Surastra. Rock Edict 13 records remorse at the conquest of Kalinga and expounds the doctrine of conquest by righteousness (*dharmavijaya*). It also mentions many subordinate and border peoples in such a way as to suggest that his empire was not clearly defined and was largely based on homage and tribute from other rulers. Other inscriptions show that management of the empire was attempted by sending officials on tour, notably a new class called *dharmamahāmattas* who were to preach the *dharma*. The inscriptions are concerned with moral exhortations. It appears that Aśoka exercised his power very largely by asserting paternal authority and assuming responsibility for the conduct of his subjects. His concern is primarily moral. Some of his directions are addressed to Buddhist monks, of whom he claimed headship as emperor, but it is not clear that he entered the

order. Buddhism claims him for itself and portrays his rule with a blood-stained start, for contrast. But he was not sectarian and patronized other orders including the Ājīvakas.

Various causes have been suggested for the break-up of the Mauryan empire, some of them purely speculative. It is reasonable to assume that invasion, unwieldy size of the kingdom, local fissiparousness, the ambition of regional administrators and treachery all played a part, since there is evidence that all these things existed. But it is the appearance rather than the disappearance of the empire that requires a positive explanation, and some comments on the nature of the Mauryan empire are made elsewhere in this book.

The following period was characterized by continuous foreign invasions in the north-west and the rise and fall of many small kingdoms and petty empires. The tendency of the view of Mauryan empire suggested here is, however, to minimize the qualitative difference between the two political scenes. Under Aśoka all men accepted the authority of one ruler whose agents came round from time to time; in the following age they did not, though the difference was in their acceptance rather than any pattern of administrative organization.

Post-Mauryan Era

In about 183 B.C. the Mauryas were ousted by the *brāhmaṇa* general Puṣyamitra Śuṅga who kept the title of commander-in-chief and ruled over a loose empire. His dynasty was followed in 75–30 B.C. by the Kāṇvas, established by the minister Vasudeva who killed King Devabhūmi. The Magadhan empire had shrunk and wave after wave of foreigners flowed into the north-west. First the *Yavana* Euthydemus established his rule, followed early in the second century B.C. by his son Demetrius in the Punjab. A second wave crossed the frontier under Eucratides. Thereafter the *Śakas* (Scyths) in Bactria attacked the *Yavanas* (Greeks) in India and reached Mathura in the first century B.C. It is notable that all these rulers were assimilated and given a place in the *varṇa* system.

Two features of their reign are the common practice of double rule (as of Azes and Spalirises) and the appearance of grandiloquent titles.

Maues during the first century B.C. was followed by Azes. Another wave, of Iranians called Pahlavas, came in. The first was Kadphises I. A successor, Kaniṣka, gained control of most of the north and north-west. A nameless king issued coins with the title *Maharajasa Rajadirajasa Mahatasa Tratarasa*.

A Chedi dynasty appeared in Orissa, including notably Khāravela who entered upon a career of conquest and accumulated an empire.

At about the same time and for centuries thereafter Sātavāhanas or Āndhras ruled in the north-west Deccan. They were followed by the Vākātakas, a dynasty founded by Vindhyaśakti. During the first three centuries A.D. a large area in the west was under the Western Satraps, including Rudradāman who was ruling in about 150 A.D.

The two most important features of the picture presented by all these unstable empires are the constant rise and fall of kingdoms, expanding against each other in a state of endemic warfare, and the insecurity of the throne, which is an object of treachery and intrigue. These features are prominent also in the *Arthaśāstra*, but they are likely to have been characteristic of the Nanda period too, and the material of the *Arthaśāstra* might be imagined to bear on either.

Other important information in the *Arthaśāstra* chiefly concerns administration, which is described in meticulous detail, giving an impression of totalitarianism. This is an entirely misleading impression since what is outlined is not the actual working of an empire but the ideal working of a kingdom. What is wanting is evidence that administration was in reality integrated and under central control. It is at least as likely, as a later chapter will suggest, that it was random, corrupt and unreliable.

The Guptas

The most significant dynasty of the early centuries A.D. was that of the Guptas. The first was Chandragupta, who appeared in 320 as ruler of Magadha and Kośala and married a Licchavi. Gold coins testify to the union. From 335 until 375 reigned Samudragupta who was evidently chosen as heir by his father. He made many military excursions. Valuable information about his empire is given by the Allahabad pillar inscription. Nine kings are named, some identifiable as having reigned at Padmāvati, Vidiśā, Mathurā, Ahicchatra and in Bengal; they were all acquired by conquest. Border states mentioned include Samatāṭa, Kāmarūpa and Nepāla (in Bengal and on the north-east frontier). Nine tribal feudatories are also named. This shows that (assuming that the nine kingdoms and nine tribes really were vassals, and not simply compiled for the sake of the magical significance of the number nine) the tribal states were sometimes conquered, but conquest did not involve absorption and they kept their identity. The area under Samudragupta's rule can be described as extending to Bengal, the Himalayas, the Punjab, Bhilsa and the Vindhya. Conquest of the forest tribes, presumably in the hilly south of the region, was also claimed for him. But the distinction between provinces, themselves under baronial governors or royal viceroys, and vassal states, which may have been vassals in no more than name if

their rulers were strong, is very blurred and may be academic.

Chandragupta II ruled from 375–376 until 413–415. His daughter married the Vākāṭaka Rudrasena. He defeated the Western Śakas and added Kathiawar and Gujarat to his titular dominions. The Chinese traveller Fa Hsien visited India in his time and has left a record. It is said that this Chandragupta was the patron of the famed poet and dramatist Kālidāsa. Kumāragupta reigned from about 415 until 454 or 455. He performed the Aśvamedha sacrifice. Comparatively little is known of his reign which may have been notably well-ordered and peaceful. Towards the end however fresh invasions began. His son Skandagupta (455–467) was much exercised by the invading Hūṇas, against whom he won great victories.

From this period on the empire weakened. Hūṇas pushed into the north-west between 500 and 700. The Gupta empire was confined to the east : it was not extinguished by western empires like Yaśodharman's but suffered from rebellious feudatories and disintegrated after Budhagupta. In the seventh century arose a strong ruler, Harsha, of the Vardhana line which took increasingly exalted titles. His kingdom was first based at Thānesar but moved to Kanauj. He undertook many campaigns and accumulated an empire which included strong vassals.

Feudal Nature of Empire

The picture here is of an increasingly 'feudal' sort of empire. A prominent feature of the period is the practice of making land grants. Other features are the increasing codification and pedantry of *dharma* embodied in *smṛtis* and the apparent decentralization of authority. However, not many important distinctions can be made between the empires of the Mauryas and Guptas on the basis of available evidence, as a later chapter will suggest. At all times the basic Indian community was a local professional or caste group, a *varga*, and the patchwork of communities continued much the same, different patterns of political organization being lightly super-imposed. The chief conclusion that emerges is that evolution was in a line, and different empires did not arbitrarily assume qualitatively different characteristics. Twentieth-century administrative centralization and mediaeval 'feudalism' are not liable to arise independently at any time : the first needs to follow the second after a process of growth involving technical advance and the development of political institutions.

NOTES

¹For a discussion of the date of his accession see R. Thapar, *Aśoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (Oxford, 1961), pp. 31–33; Cf. P.H.L. Eggermont, *The Chronology of the Reign of Aśoka Moriya* (Leiden, 1956), pp. 164–167, and in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 82, pp. 419–421.

CHAPTER II

POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS OF VEDIC INDIA

The study of political institutions in ancient India draws very largely on Sanskrit literature, the *śāstras* and *smṛtis*, and much of the discussion of what the sources show thus applies to a period which can only be vaguely defined, around the beginning of the Christian era. But the origins of political institutions following Aryan immigration, during a similarly vague period of many centuries, perhaps centering around 1,000 B.C. have come in for a great deal of attention also.

Over Reliance on Literary Sources

Materials available to a historian that bear on this period include archaeological and to some extent ethnological evidence; but these touch the matter of political institutions only very lightly, and this chapter is concerned primarily with the literary sources, the hymns and odes of the Aryans, the earliest historical records (if we exclude the tantalising Indus Valley seal inscriptions)—the Vedas, that have given their name to the era and form the basis for most of what has been said by historians about it.

It is normal, and convenient, to treat the political behaviour of the Vedic Aryans as the origin of what came later in the time of the classical Sanskrit writings, to see their institutions as the embryo of state and kingship as known from the *śāstras*. It is normal, because it is natural to regard the accounts of things in classical Sanskrit literature as the later forms of those given by the earlier Vedic Sanskrit literature. It is convenient, because there is nothing else besides the Vedic Sanskrit literature in which to seek the parentage of classical institutions. Too little is known about the contribution of the non-Aryans, the indigenous inhabitants.

However, it is worth remembering that to see forms of government and institutions as parts of an Aryan cultural tradition, moulded by the thoughts and prejudices of Aryans, is only one approach. Hindu religion and society may owe much more to the original non-Aryans (Mediterraneans, Dravidians, whatever we call them) than is easy to recognize.

Thus when we try to describe the life of the Vedic Aryans, we should

be more interested in the ecology of the situation in which they found themselves than in analogies with presumed later developments which may mislead us into ascribing to them religious ideas, social divisions and political functions that were foreign to them.

Room for Further Research

There are various things that seem important to investigate. The Vedic Aryans were ceasing to be pastoral and nomadic; they were beginning to practise sedentary agriculture, settling the Indus and Ganges plains and forming village communities. Does wet rice cultivation necessarily require supra-tribe or supra-village organization to get it going? To maintain it, once established? Might informal co-operation between villages be enough to apportion river water, plan canals? If an over-arching political authority is lacking, might economic necessity bring it forth? Or perhaps there is a chicken-and-egg relationship between organization and irrigation. The answers to these questions are not obvious and it would be valuable to get some help from the Vedas, if we could.

Again, we want to know how Vedic society was made up. What were the socially important groups, who constituted the elite? Within a tribe, was there co-operation between autonomous segments or was there a central political institution? If so, how powerful was it? How could a man come to be a chieftain? What were his functions as a chieftain? Were there full-time political officials or were decisions carried out by sub-chiefs?

The difficulty with these questions is that the Vedas do not provide satisfactory answers to them. To some, perhaps, they provide no answer. There is still plenty of room for research into the Vedas on new lines before we can be sure of the answers they furnish. But it is obviously not the purpose of this chapter to undertake the exhaustive study that would be necessary for this.

The purpose of this chapter is limited; it is to glance at the sort of Vedic references that have been used so far as evidence about Vedic political institutions and to offer the following contentions :

We have not yet assembled the information that we need to identify the important groups constituting the Vedic society and to get a picture of the social and political relations between them;

It has not been proved that Vedic tribes had any institution that we can usefully call kingship;

There is no evidence of anything that can be called empire, except by licence;

The Vedic dignitaries referred to were not high officers of state, or officials, or bureaucrats;

The assemblies referred to were not democratic assemblies;

There is no evidence of organized popular elections.

These claims are not as radical as they may seem, and not all are new, but they are significant. There is no particular harm in using words such as 'king', 'empire', or 'official,' so long as they are allowed to mean no more than what the sources show the original Sanskrit words to have meant. But this is so different from the normal meanings of the English words often used that in some cases it is better to abandon the conventional translations and seek a new vision of the whole structure of Vedic political relations.

The Vedas, being largely hymns to gods or ritual prescriptions, are not concerned to describe these relations specifically, and it is necessary to look for hints here and there. The first stage of the analysis is easy enough : there are various references, by name, to groups such as the Pūrus, Bharatas and so forth, and it is normal to describe such groups as tribes. However, it is not so easy to see how the structure of each tribe should be described. For instance, are we entitled to speak of clans constituting each tribe and lineages constituting each clan? Were there senior lineages supplying chieftains? Whatever the groups were, what were the lines of descent? And what—an enormous question—was the pattern of kinship?

Inconclusive Terms

There are indeed terms used which apparently refer to groups within the tribal structure. There is, for example, a passage which means something like 'He gains treasure with his folk, his people, his family and his sons.'¹ This introduces us to the terms *jana*, *viś* and *janman*.

It may indeed be that such terms are, at any rate sometimes, applied in the Vedas to specific kinship groups in a clearly defined kinship system—a concentric series of tribe, clan, lineage, perhaps. But unfortunately the usage of these terms is neither so clear nor so consistent as to allow—so far as the present state of research can show—any particular conclusions.

Jana means folk or people in classical Sanskrit. In various Vedic references it may mean a tribe. In one place a *jana* is also a *grāma*.² A *grāma* is a village in the later language, but here seems to be part of the kinship system—a cluster of families. (The *grāmaṇī*, mentioned below, is a leader of the *grāma*.)

Viś refers to a settlement, and came to mean people or folk generally.³ Derived from it is the term *vaiśya*, the third estate of later society, the agricultural majority of the caste Hindus. In the Vedas it is sometimes part of a *jana*.⁴

Precise meanings may be implicit in some such terms, but for all we can see they tend to flow into each other. If *janman* referred to a particular set of relatives in the immediate family, we do not know how to define it. Thus some of the material for a description of Vedic society is lacking.

Speculation about Caste System's Origin

There has been some speculation about the origin of the caste system among the Vedic Aryans. Two propositions occur and recur in historical literature : that the four estates that later formed a framework for caste, the four *varnas*, originated from the racial difference between Aryans and non-Aryans, and that the evolution of a hierarchical theory of society among the Indians was brought by the design of priests who were concerned to propagate ideas that would benefit them as a class.

There is little that can be said about these propositions as far as the Vedas are concerned except that they are guesswork. This is not to disparage them, but it is necessary to remind ourselves how little we really know. The four estates of later society, priestly, warrior or noble, merchant or agricultural, and servile (*brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya*, *śūdra*), get little or no mention through much or most of the Vedic period. They are mentioned in a religious context as having been created separately,⁵ but this is in the tenth book of the *Rg Veda* which is likely to have been composed later than the rest. In later texts it is said that the *varṇas* were divinely created, each from a limb of the primordial first man.^{5a} *Varna* certainly means colour among other things, and may be the first three estates represent the fair-skinned Aryans and the last the darker peoples who were subjugated by them; but we would still like to know why the Aryans divided themselves into three *varnas*.

We shall be entitled to suggest, or to deny, that the caste system was devised by the *brāhmaṇas*, or by some *brāhmaṇas*, when we have information about the development of a hierarchical pattern of relationships in society at large and outside the purely ritual symbolic context where it seems quite reasonable to find *brāhmaṇas* playing an exalted role.

But what seems at least equally likely, and what has not usually been given the emphasis it deserves, is the suggestion that the caste system as we understand it did not originate with the immigrant Vedic Aryans at all. There are two types of ingredient in the caste system : one is the embracing scheme of four *varṇas*, and the other is the caste proper,

jāti, a local, occupational and kinship group with its own rules of marriage, eating, ritual and so on. Now all that we know from the Vedas is that late in the period the *varṇas* were recognized and given ritual significance, but this does not prove them to have been much more than an occupational classification of society, without implying hereditary fixity. Perhaps the estates were coming to be hereditary, but if so this was because each local *jāti* was assigned to one of them, and the *jātis* had their own rules of heredity. And about the *jātis* in the later sense of caste groups we know next to nothing from Vedic times. There is therefore no reason why we should not see the *varṇas* as having originated from the Aryan mythology, and the *jātis* from the practices of those who were there before the Aryans arrived.

Meaning of Raja

So far, for these comments on society, we have had to rely largely on negative evidence. But when we come to ask what we know of Vedic kingship, the evidence appears to be positive.

The term *rāja*, familiar from later Indian history, occurs frequently. There is no doubt that these Vedic *rājas* were regarded as illustrious men, that they had great responsibilities, that the people looked to them for protection, that they looked to the people for support, that they sought to increase their glory. Such statements have often been made, and documented. But all this does not show who the *rājas* actually were, or what they actually did. And it is simply not legitimate to assume, without evidence, that they were kings, and behaved like kings, in the same way as those who bore the same title in later centuries.

At various points the term *rāja* is applied to gods such as Mitra and Varuna.⁶ There is a reference to *rājas* coming together in an assembly (or in the Assembly, *samiti*), as if they were nobles.⁷ *Rāja* is not clearly distinguished from *rājanya*, which appears to refer to a noble or aristocratic class.⁸ At one point it is said that only he is a *rāja* for whom the *rājas* approve the *rājyam*.⁹ This last word is usually translated as 'kingdom,' which may arguably be appropriate for classical Sanskrit, but there is no evidence that the Vedic Aryans knew of any such thing as a kingdom. By the ordinary canons of derivation *rājya* means the condition of a *rāja*, and that is obviously appropriate here.

Such allusions do not fit with our idea of kingship. There is just one king in any place; kings do not commonly come together in assemblies. What seems to make better sense of the last passage cited is the view that it means something like this : nobody should call himself a chieftain, or a man of chiefly family, without being acknowledged as such by

his peers. Thus the first suggestion we can make about the meaning of *rāja* is that it refers to a man of superior lineage within a clan or tribe. Maybe it refers sometimes to a particular individual with a unique position in the group, but there is not much we can say about this, and we do not know whether we ought to call the group a clan or a tribe or what.

We still need to know how the *rājas*, whether as individual chiefs or as a group in the kinship system, showed their superiority. We may well imagine that they deliberated in their assemblies about war, and led their groups into action, for the Vedic tribes were from time to time at war with each other and with the indigenous *dasyus*. We may imagine that the germ of administration was sown with the organizational needs of wet rice cultivation, but this is a guess. So far as the Vedas show, the *rājas* demonstrated their superiority by making expensive sacrifices, and there is no reason to suppose that this was not in fact the most important part of a *rāja's* function.

It has been argued before that the *rāja* was chiefly a donor financing a sacrifice, or a dignitary, or a noble man.¹⁰ Recent research by J. Santucci at the Australian National University suggests that the word *rāja* is actually derived from the root *rj*, 'to extend,' rather than *rāj*, 'to shine.'¹¹ Either way, it need not, unless there is other evidence, mean more in itself than 'illustrious.' Most of the Vedic references are in ritual and sacrificial contexts. The *rāja* who makes the greatest sacrifice gets the greatest glory.

Their social importance can only suggest that the *rājas* were persons of senior descent who gave themselves a patriarchal dignity, regarded themselves and were regarded as protectors of their kinsfolk or clan folk, and on all important occasions made offerings to the gods on behalf of their groups. Whether these groups were clans, whether there was a senior or *rājanya* clan within each tribe, whether there was a senior or *rājanya* lineage within each clan, or how the system is in any other way to be described, are things that we do not know. But the function of the chiefs in officiating at ceremonies that symbolized the unity of a whole group of people for all the kinship sub-groups within it is easy to see. It is also easy to believe that the *rājas*, like family patriarchs, umpired disputes among tribesmen related to them and helped those who were in difficulties. But this is a far cry still from kings and kingdoms.

No Real Signs of Empire

It is an even further cry from emperors and empires. Yet there are Vedic words which lend themselves to translation in this way. For example, *samrāj* appears in the *Rg Veda* as a title given to Indra and

Varuṇa.¹² This, on its own, may be seen as no more than a variant on *rāja*, meaning that a mighty god is like a mighty *rāja* (though the prefix *sa-* adds nothing specific to the meaning), but a more precise application to grades of a human *rāja*'s glory is found in a late Vedic passage which says that by offering the *rājasūya* sacrifice a man becomes *rāja*, whereas by the *vājapeya* sacrifice he becomes *saṃrāj*.¹³

A *rāja* could increase his glory by other means than sacrifice. 'Before slaying Vrtra [the demon] he was Indra, it is true; but after slaying Vrtra he was Mahendra, even as a *rāja* becomes a *mahārāja* after obtaining a victory.'¹⁴ But this does not demonstrate the idea of empire. The god Indra did not gain a servant; he defeated an enemy. The *mahārāja* does not gain a subject territory—at least this is not what is said—he merely increases his glory by showing his prowess.

Other words suggesting accretion of a *rāja*'s glory occur. In the *Rg Veda*, the title *ekarāja* is applied to Indra—'the one and only *rāja*'¹⁵ *Adhirāja*, 'superior *rāja*,' also appears. Indra is victor, is not defeated, is *adhirāja* among *rājas*. *Bhaujya*, *svarājya*, *vairājya* and *pārameṣṭhya* all occur in the Vedic literature, late or early, but are chiefly applied to gods in a general sense implying power and magnificence.¹⁶

B. Schlerath has made a special study of these terms.¹⁷ He translates *saṃrāj* as 'Allkönig' or 'Oberkönig' and suggests that, the subjects of this form of dominion being often specified, it is superior to *svarāj* and *virāj*. *Svarāj* is superior to *virāj*. But in general the terms are not greatly differentiated in meaning.¹⁸

Whatever may be said about these gradations of chiefly magnificence, it is not apparent that those who claimed to belong to higher grades actually had territorial power over subject dominions. Lallanji Gopal in a study of these terms concludes that the *saṃrāj* had suzerainty over a wide area but not administrative power.¹⁹

There is no question here that, by the time of the Buddha and of Bimbisāra, unique kingship, attempts at subjugation, and imperial ambition had become parts of the political landscape. Naturally, it is to be expected that they developed during the preceding Vedic period. What is asserted here is that, at any rate in the time of the Vedas themselves, those who laid claims to the higher grades of *rājya* were, so far as the evidence allows us to say, members of the tribal elite and no more; there are no real signs of empire or what might loosely be called feudal relations.

Administrative power over an empire may not have existed, but we may still seek evidence of it within a settlement or proto-kingdom at least in late Vedic times. And indeed in the *Brāhmaṇa* texts we find

references to what look like the beginnings of state office and palace life. What we have not so far found, and what is highly desirable, is some clue about the beginnings of revenue administration and of the organization of manpower.

Ratnins : Palace Dignitaries

The allusions that occur are not to this sort of thing. What we have is a list of *ratnins*, jewelled ones, who look like dignitaries around the king. These *ratnins* are mentioned in a ritual context, where certain oblations are described. A list including the *rāja* and a number of others is given for example in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*.²⁰ The others are the general, the court chaplain (*purohita*), the chief queen, *sūta*, *grāmaṇī*, *ksattṛ*, *saṅgrahītṛ*, *akṣāvāpa*, *bhāgadugha*, *govikartana*, *dūta* and *parivṛktī*. Both *sūta* and *saṅgrahītṛ* apparently mean 'charioteer', but the first of these, who was an important official in epic times, was evidently more of a herald. The *ksattṛ* was perhaps a carver, attendant or coachman. The *parivṛktī* was a subordinate wife. The *govikartana* was the cow slaughterer. The *grāmaṇī* is often reckoned to be equivalent to the later *grāmika*, village headman, but this is wrong. The *grāma* was at first a group of people rather than a place, and the *grāmaṇī* was the group's leader—perhaps a subordinate chief, or the senior member of a non-*rājanya* lineage. He was one endowed with wealth and precedence.²¹

The *ratnins* have been discussed in some detail by W. Rau.²² He concludes that the *bhāgadugha* cuts up the meat; the *ksattṛ* carves and perhaps serves. He may also be a cook.²³ The *senāni* is very close to the king. The *sūta* is a herald. The *saṅgrahītṛ* is equivalent to *sārathi* and has charge of the chariots.²⁴ He also has interesting conclusions about the development of the *grāma*. The *grāma* is said to be like a necklace or a sleeping snake. Here the ends meet to form a circle. This suggests that the *grāma* was at this stage the circle of waggons, convenient for defence, of a pastoral community. This evolved gradually into the village of later usage.²⁵

References to the *ratnins* show them taking part in ceremonies. Historians have most often described them as state officials of various sorts, adjusting the translations to accord with this interpretation, but the fact that the titles refer to household rather than political office militates against this. J.W. Spellman in a useful discussion of the matter²⁶ concludes that the list of *ratnins* makes more sense on a religious than on a political level. His discussion seems to suggest that some, such as the *akṣāvāpa* (dice-keeper) and *govikartana* (cow slaughterer), did not actually carry out the roles suggested for them by these titles, but merely symbolized them in rituals representing the good fortune and material

resources of the *rāja*. If this is the intention, there is no warrant for this conclusion: others, such as the general and the queens, clearly had roles outside ritual, and there is no reason why the lesser palace dignitaries should not have done so. But if the meaning is that the *ratnins* as a class had a ceremonial rather than a political task, this is clearly acceptable. One can see these offices as perhaps palace sinecures given as rewards for service.

Thus we cannot discover anything that can meaningfully be called a state apparatus in the course of an examination of the titles and functions of Vedic tribal dignitaries. This does not mean that none existed. It only means that we should beware of making unwarranted assumptions.

No Democratic or Sovereign Assemblies

Constitutional state apparatus may be sought by another avenue. There may not have been a bureaucracy in any sense, but there must have been a process of political decision-making, however the decisions may have been put into effect. And constitutional processes have often been discerned by historians in the functioning of Vedic assemblies, the *sabhā* and the *samiti*. (Some attention has also been given to the *vidatha*, seen as a council performing military and distributive work; or alternatively as a religious congregation.²⁷)

The *sabhā* has been defined as 'Halle, Spielsaal, Gesellschaftsraum, Versammlung,' and the *samiti* as 'Versammlung, Zusammenkunft.'²⁸ This reflects the looseness of the terms as designations of assemblies or places of assembly, and their tendency to flow into one another.

It seems that the *sabhā* and the *samiti* were quite powerful and important. Various passages show that the members of these bodies were themselves powerful and important, that the co-operation of the *samiti* was valued by *rājas*, that the *sabhā* was attended by *rājanyas*, and so on.²⁹ Passages in the *Atharva Veda* declare that it is desirable that the *samiti* should constantly be favourable to the *rāja*, and that violation of the property of *brāhmaṇas* forfeits the *samiti's* goodwill.³⁰

There has been a great deal of discussion of the nature of these assemblies on the basis of this sort of evidence. Underlying the discussion there has constantly been an assumption that the *sabhā* and *samiti* were constitutional bodies with sets of rules to govern their proceedings, and with influence over the king (*rāja*). Thus it has sometimes been argued that they were democratic assemblies and the repositories of popular sovereignty. But the nature of the references in the sources does not allow any such conclusions. *Rājas* may have valued the co-operation of the assemblies, as any chieftains value the co-operation of tribal elders,

but this does not show that the assemblies were democratic or that they had sovereign constitutional powers.

This sort of point has been made before, but maybe we should go further and acknowledge that the *sabhā* and the *samiti* need not have been formal constitutional institutions at all. It is not obvious that they were 'the *Sabhā*' and 'the *Samiti*', each with its own procedural machinery; both words meant 'assembly' with a small 'a'. And the idea of democracy may not have had any meaning if there was no governing aristocracy that could be either mild or oppressive but only a set of senior lineages with ritual functions, if there was little government of any sort beyond military leadership, if lineage members who felt their claims to status were neglected by their fellows could put up with their followers and start new settlements elsewhere. It seems likely from all the evidence that these assemblies were jamborees of *rājanyas* where all manner of things were discussed, banquets consumed, sacrifices held (though they may, like their Icelandic counterparts, have served as rudimentary parliaments).³¹

No Democratic Elections for Rājas

By the same token, the evidence for election of kings or for the dependence of kings on the populace does not demonstrate much beyond the contents of ceremonial invocations. Various Vedic passages have been cited, and these seem to support two claims: that *rājas* had the approval of the people, and that the *ratnins* were 'king-makers'; they elected or appointed the *rāja*. It is said, for example, that they are the givers of the kingdom or kingship (*rāṣṭra*, a term to be examined in a later chapter) to the *rāja*.³² And we have noted before the *Brāhmaṇa* assertion that only he is *rāja* for whom the *rājas* approve that status.

Such passages show perhaps that *rājas* hoped for the approval of their fellow tribesmen, and suggest that some sought it, as we can imagine any political, religious or military dignitary doing. And they show that there were ceremonies at which perhaps clan seniors initiated their fellows or their leaders, symbolically giving them their new dignity like archbishops putting crowns on the heads of new monarchs. They do not show that there were democratic elections.

Some passages speak explicitly of people choosing (*vṛṇānah*) a *rāja*, but the contexts, usually descriptive of gods who are compared to *rājas*, suggest, if anything, that the actual tribal practice was that of choosing a military leader in the face of an emergency (perhaps at a tribal assembly). This is not to say that such choosing may not have been part of the process whereby a *rāja* came to be a unique leader rather than a member of a chiefly class. But it is not the same thing as a democratic election.

Not to be ignored is the view of N.G. Chapekar that *vṛṇānaḥ* here means not 'choosing' at all but 'gratifying,' thus invalidating the evidence.³³

J.W. Spellman, discussing these passages,³⁴ cautiously concludes that there is no proof that the monarchy was not sometimes elective, but explicitly distinguishes this from the claim that it was elective.

Vain Search for Modern State Apparatus

What emerges in general from the investigation to which this chapter has been devoted is that the search in the Vedas for anything like modern state apparatus or modern political ideas may well be a wild goose chase, and that not as much is known about Vedic Indian political institutions as we would like to know, nor as much as has sometimes been claimed. There are two possibilities of misunderstanding here that should be avoided.

Firstly, there is no intention here of making out that the Vedic Aryans were too primitive and barbaric to have political institutions. That is not the point. The point is that the political institutions they had were of a different sort from ours and need to be discovered by a different line of enquiry.

Secondly, there is no intention here of belittling ritual prescriptions and odes to gods as historical sources. On the contrary, a study of the mythology underlying Vedic rituals is likely to lead to useful conclusions about the society which the mythology reflects. But the techniques for such a study have not yet been sufficiently developed or applied.

NOTES

¹RV 2.26.3 Sa ij janena sa viśā sa janmanā sa putrair vājam bharate.

²RV 3.33.11.

³A.A. Macdonell and A.B. Keith, *Vedic Index*, II, p. 305f.

⁴ibid., I, p. 269.

⁵RV 10.90.

⁶Vāj Sam 31.11; Pañcaviṃśa Br. 6.1.6–11.

⁷E. g. RV 1.24.12. 13.

⁸RV 10.97.6; N.G. Chapekar, 'Rajan', *Journal of Indian History*, vol. 42 (1964), p. 222, claims however that *saṁiti* here means 'sacrifice.'

⁹RV 9.10.3; 10.78.1. N.G. Chapekar, *op. cit.* p. 28, refers to his view that *rājanya* is not a Ṛgvedic word.

¹⁰S. Br. 9.3.2.5 Yasmai vai rājāno rājyām anumanyante sa rājā bhavate na sa yasmai na

¹¹N.G. Chapekar, *op. cit.* The latter two terms are admitted as possible translations at RV 10.43.2; but it is argued that *rāja* and its derivatives refer either to a god or to a donor at a sacrifice in most places.

¹²On the derivation of *rāja*, see also Grassman's Concordance, and L. Renou, *Études Védiques* vol. 4, p. 127; vol. 7, p. 31; vol. 14, p. 99.

¹²RV 8.16.1; 5.68.2.

¹³Ś. Br. 5.1.1.13.

¹⁴ibid. 1.6.4.21.

¹⁵RV 8.37.3.

¹⁶RV 10.128.9; Ait. Br. 39.1.

¹⁷B. Schlerath, *Das Königtum im Rg und Atharva Veda* (Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes 33.3).

¹⁸ibid., p. 132.

¹⁹Lallanji Gopal, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* for 1963, p. 29.

²⁰Ś. Br. 5.3.1.

²¹RV 10.107.5.

²²W. Rau, *Staat und Gesellschaft im alten Indien* (Wiesbaden 1957).

²³ibid. p. 100ff.

²⁴ibid. p. 107ff.

²⁵ibid. p. 51.

²⁶J.W. Spellman, *Political Theory of Ancient India*. (Oxford 1964), pp. 69–72.

²⁷See R.S. Sharma, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India* (Delhi, 1959), ch. 5, and in the *Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society*, for 1952, pp. 429ff. R.S. Sharma's views have been criticised in some detail by J.P. Sharma in "The Question of the Vidatha in Vedic India," *J.R.A.S.* 1965, pp. 43–56. See also the note by H.W. Bailey at the end of this article. J.P. Sharma sees the *vidatha* as a religious congregation, without political functions. But perhaps the best that can be said is that the nature of the *vidatha*, if at all specific, is obscure.

²⁸K.F. Geldner, *Der Rigveda in Auswahl* (Glossary) (Stuttgart 1907), pp. 190f.

²⁹E.g. RV 10.166.4; Ś. Br. 3.3.4.14.

³⁰AV 6.88.3; 5.19.5.

³¹Significant is AV 7.12.2 which describes the *sahhā* as *narīṣṭa*, "desired of men" or "mirthful." This perhaps suggests something more like a jamboree than a political assembly.

³²RV 10.173. AV 6.87, 6.88.1–2; 3.4.2; 3.5.7.

³³N.G. Chapekar, *op. cit.* pp. 224f on RV 10.124.8.

³⁴J.W. Spellman, *op. cit.* pp. 51f.

CHAPTER III

KING AND STATE

An assumption which often lies beneath the discussion of ancient political institutions in India is that a king was the constitutional head of a state. This is not an assumption that seems to beg many questions. It does not imply, for example, that a king was a constitutional monarch with little or no real power. There might possibly be numerous checks on his power, or, alternatively, the constitution might be that of a totalitarian regime, designed to put every instrument of oppression into the ruler's hands. To say that he was a constitutional head means no more than that there was a set of principles, which might be very few, very vague, and unwritten, applying to the country he ruled and regulating the relationships between the political institutions in it. A new ruler might compose a new constitution to please himself, if he was powerful enough to do so; but still the country would have these principles and the working of its institutions could be described by reference to them. It seems an innocuous enough assumption to make. And the discussion of ancient Indian politics has often taken the form of a quest for the regulating principles informing the working of the institutions.

Did States and Constitutions Exist?

There seems likewise to be little harm in the idea of a state. The kings ruled over countries with names, and these countries can certainly be called states for many purposes. The use of this term also does not presuppose a great deal. This is not a case where pedantic definitions are appropriate, or where it is necessary to discover exactly how sociologists or political scientists use the word; it is enough to let it have the connotations it bears in ordinary usage. These connotations can be characterized thus :

- (a) A piece of territory that ideally has definable boundaries, though in practice these may not be clearly demarcated;
- (b) A set of laws or customs which applies specifically to this territory and does not apply outside them;
- (c) An apparatus of government which is recognized as legitimate within the territory and not outside it.

There are purposes for which it is useful to distinguish between states and stateless societies, when 'state' is best used to refer to the government apparatus; but for ordinary purposes the characteristics described above offer an acceptable minimal definition of the term, as it has been applied to the Indian kingdoms. It is easy therefore to take it for granted that kings were constitutional heads of states; but it can be questioned whether, in these senses, either constitutions or states existed.

This questioning is not a nugatory exercise in semantics; it will pave the way for a view of 'foreign' relations which is important for our understanding of the nature of the kingdoms.

Some qualification is necessary to the thesis in the form stated above. There certainly were local customs some of which affected political processes, and there certainly were countries ruled by kings who were regarded as legitimate within them. But the local customs were not the same thing as the formal codes of political rights, duties and procedures that have often been read into the *smṛtis*, and the laws and governments of countries were not, so far as the evidence shows, confined to specific territories by their nature.

It is easy to treat the lawbooks or codes of moral duty and the sciences or manuals, the *smṛtis* and *śāstras*, as constitutions in many ways. Parts of them seek to establish definitively what the laws are, what are the authorities for interpreting them, what account should be taken of customs, how trials should be conducted, what punishments awarded, what are the duties of a king, how his advisory bodies should be constituted, what departments of government should be organized, how they should be staffed, how decisions should be made and promulgated—all the features we expect to find in a constitution are to be found in them.

But all the same they are not constitutions because they are not designed for particular territories. There is no book calling itself, for example, the *Arthaśāstra* of such-and-such a country. This could mean that all countries had identical constitutions, but it doesn't. Each king could adopt the whole body of *smṛti* lore, or a selection from it, as his code of political procedure, but still that was not by definition the code of his country. There was nothing in the code to stop him from being king of all India. His writ was not confined by it to any defined territory. What is still missing is a code that defines the way in which a king shall govern a particular place.

Vedic Rāja : Not a King

It is worth recalling who a king was and how he came to be so. The Vedic *rāja* was not obviously a king in any useful sense, but by the time

of the classical Sanskrit literature kingdoms were established in settled agricultural communities where particular individuals made unique claims to authority.

Different Ways of Becoming a King

There were different ways in which an individual might come to be king. Primogeniture was recognized as the notional standard form of succession. The *Arthaśāstra* says that the eldest son should succeed his father except in a calamity. But primogeniture was not by any means a cast-iron rule. Dynasties frequently changed, kingdoms disappeared and re-appeared, governors established dynasties in provinces. A Buddhist *Jātaka* story shows ministers disposing of the succession at will; the *Arthaśāstra* suggests that a minister might cause dissension among the claimants and take the throne for himself. Thus a man might come to be king in any of several ways: by direct descent; by taking up arms against brothers and other rivals; by the support of ministers; by creating a new throne, having been a governor before; and by conquest.

Kshatriya Birth or Engagement in Ruling

One limitation on the qualifications for kingship needs to be noticed: a king was supposed to be of the *kṣatriya* estate. It is an interesting feature of the sources that the words *kṣatriya* and *rāja* are used with a great deal of interchangeability. To be a king was to be a warrior. To be a warrior, it might seem, was to be a potential king. Usage of the words blurs the distinction we might expect between the monarch with his unique majesty and the whole class of *kṣatriyas*. This is a little reminiscent of the relationship between *rāja* and *rājanya* in the Vedas. The interchangeability of the terms suggests the survival of a notion that had characterized the Vedic kinship structure beyond the disappearance of that structure: the notion that there was a class of senior families who led the community in war and whose mode of life was martial. Any of these families might hope to achieve the unique dignity of leading the community, or splitting off from it and founding a new one.

Non-*kṣatriya* kings were of course known. A legend, true or false, assigns the Nanda rulers at Magadha to the *śūdra* class; the *brāhmaṇa* Puṣyamitra Śūṅga, though he eschewed royal titles, was a ruler and the ancestor of rulers. The ancient authorities asked themselves whether a non-*kṣatriya* king was preferable to anarchy. Often the answer given was yes.

Aparārka says: 'When one who is a non-*kṣatriya* does the work of

a *kṣatriya*, he should do all this [that is prescribed for a king], in view of the principle that by taking on the function of a particular person or thing one receives the *dharma* of the other.¹

People's Support, No Constitutional Election

What identified a king as a king was partly his *kṣatriya* birth, partly the fact that he was actually engaged in ruling. This is a fairly pragmatic view of kingship, and there is nothing in it about constitutions. We do not find the doctrine that a king must take office according to the established institutions of his own country. True, there are plenty of references suggesting that a king should seek the approval of his people. It was not only in Vedic times that 'king-makers' were mentioned: the epics have them too.² Śantanu and Puru are offered the crown at a palace assembly; Daśaratha submits his heir to the approval of vassals and others.³ But what such passages show is chiefly that there were ceremonies attached to becoming a king, and that to be successful a king needed right from the start as much support from influential men as possible. The scene is one of palace intrigue and knightly rivalry. There is no suggestion anywhere of constitutional elections or formal machinery.

Rājya Doesn't Mean State

So far the idea of political institutions inhering in a particular territory seems to be lacking; but we might expect to find it in the discussions, common in the sources, of the realm of government, its scope and nature. The word *rājya* occurs frequently in these discussions and it is usually translated as 'state.' Here, it seems, is the designation of a territory with its own laws and legitimate government. *Rājya* seems to have territorial connotations. The *Arthaśāstra* at one point, for example, makes an assertion that has been considered to mean that a land without a people cannot be a *rājya*.⁴

However, the passage in question merely says that there's no such thing as a country without people and there's no such thing as *rājya* without a country. In fact *rājya* seems to be distinct from territory. There is no presumption that *rājya* means a territory or state.

Rājya is analysed by the Sanskrit texts into several elements, and modern scholars often interpret these elements to adjust them to the features of a state as we understand it. R.S. Sharma, for example, equates them with sovereignty, government, territory, population and so forth.⁵ U.N. Ghoshal, however, has a note of caution against identifying the elements of *rājya* with the state.⁶ P.V. Kane mentions other meanings but favours 'state'.⁷ R.C.P. Singh in some places treats *rājya* as 'govern-

ment,' in the sense of government agencies or state apparatus.⁸ J.J. Anjaria accepts the meaning of 'state' but not in the full modern sense, on the ground that *rājya* does not imply anything about the relation between state and subjects.⁹ V.P. Varma rejects 'state' but speaks of 'an extremely complicated political structure' and 'organized population' associated with it, and R.P. Kangle, in at least one context, prefers 'rule' to 'state.'¹⁰

It is not obvious that *rājya* means a territory, or a government in the sense of state apparatus and institutions, or anything entailing complex political structure or organized population. The *Nitivākyaṃṛta* says: '*Rājya* is the activity of the ruler that would be appropriate to protecting the earth,' a definition that must be counted as an exception if we favour the 'state' interpretation.¹¹ But it is the definition that is literally correct. The word is a secondary derivative meaning the condition or activity of a king. This meaning fits the *Arthaśāstra* context already cited—there is no rule without a country to rule over. It also fits a context in Manu that has been seen as a reference to territory: a king oppressing his land is liable to lose his *rājya*.¹² This could mean his condition just as well as his territory.

Prakṛtis : Constituents of King's Rule

A list of seven constituents (*prakṛtis*) of *rājya* was known to political writers. They are given, for example, by the *Arthaśāstra*,¹³ by Manu,¹⁴ by Yājñavalkya,¹⁵ by Viṣṇu,¹⁶ by Amara,¹⁷ and others.¹⁸ They are the lord, the ministers, the land or people, the fortress or capital city, the treasury, the army, and allies. There are variants: *pura* and *durga* for 'city'; *bala* and *daṇḍa* for 'army'; *rāṣṭra*, *jana* and *janapada* for 'land or 'people'; *suhṛt* and *mitra* for 'ally.' There is no reasonable way of seeing any number but seven among the various terms, in spite of a reference in one place to the 'eight-membered kingdom.'¹⁹ (The critical edition however marks the first two syllables as doubtful reading.)

These seven elements, *prakṛtis*, are what constitute *rājya*, and we have to see whether what they add up to is really a state, or whether it is more likely to be the condition or activity of a king. Obviously etymology is not enough to establish a meaning, but until we find evidence for an interpretation alternative to the literal one, there is a natural presumption in favour of it.

The *Arthaśāstra* at one place discusses the relative harmfulness of defects in each of the seven elements.²⁰ The touchstone used throughout is the effect on the function of government and on the exercise of the king's right to rule. This is not the modern sense of a state.

One of the *prakṛtis*, rendered here 'land or people,' seems to indicate the territorial basis of the state that we have not so far found. What is interesting though is that it is represented by words referring to land or people interchangeably. *Jana* means 'people'; *rāṣhtra* usually means 'land'; *janapada* refers to land, countryside as opposed to city, or people. An authority cited in the *Arthasāstra* says that the fort, the treasury, the army, waterworks and livelihood are derived from *janapada*.²¹ There can be no objection to the translations of R. Shama Sastri ('people') or J.J. Meyer ('Landvolk'). The discussion of this *prakṛti* everywhere shows that it is regarded as designating the resources of the king that are derived from the countryside. *Rāṣhtra* means 'land', but in this way. It is very important and should be carefully nurtured by the king.²² All the elements of *rājya* spring from *rāṣhtra*. Thus the reference in the context of *rājya* is evidently to the material resources of the countryside in the form of minerals, produce and labour. This is obviously a constituent of the king's rule: he cannot rule without land or people or the resources with which they provide him. There is nothing to suggest that the *prakṛti* refers to the geographical confines of a constitutional state.

It is difficult to see how the ally, *mitra*, can be a constituent of a state in the modern sense. It has been suggested that *mitra* corresponds to the *de jure* status of a government that needs to be recognized by other governments, and that allies are necessary to the existence of a state.²³ However, it is the government rather than the state that depends on allies. Further, to be necessary to a thing is not to be a constituent of it. If the relationship were valid we would expect to find in the *śāstra* discussion of *mitra* a definition of *de jure* status; what we actually find is Machiavellian advice about diplomacy.

This gives the clue to the nature of *mitra*. Lacking a territorial and constitutional state, a ruler did not have a legal framework that defined and limited the geographical area of his claims. Thus he was automatically in competition with every other king in the area. A king without patronage from a more powerful ruler, or support from a weaker, or co-operation from any fellow kings, was fighting a lost cause. His kingdom could not exist except as part of an uneasy equilibrium of *blocs* in the area where rival groupings cancelled each other out. Thus *mitra* is a constituent of the king's rule.

No Indication of Organic Theory

There has been some discussion among the modern authorities of the question whether the seven *prakṛtis* show the existence of an 'organic theory' of the state. The theory is supported by the traditional analogy

between the 'seven limbs' (*saptāṅga*) and the human body, an analogy implicit indeed in the very term. It is not used by the *Arthaśāstra* but other texts, such as Manu, specify that the *rājya* is seven-limbed. Kāmandaki stresses the interdependence of the parts.²⁴ The king and the people are contributing to each other's benefit.²⁵ The same theme is reiterated elsewhere.²⁶

No doubt the modern state, the *polis*, can be analysed into certain constituent elements, and the king's rule, *rājya*, can also be analysed into constituent elements; and in each case the elements may be interdependent and lend themselves to the organic analogy. But there is no way of arguing from the interdependence (which may characterize either notion) to the *polis*. It begs the question. If the constituents named are consistent with the literal meaning of *rājya*, as in fact they are, there is no evidence of the existence of the idea of a constitutional and territorial state.

Under the heading of 'Afflictions besetting *rāja* and *rājya*', the *Arthaśāstra* at one point says: *Rāja rājyam iti prakṛtisamkṣepaḥ*.²⁷ This is usually taken to mean 'The *rāja* is the *rājya*; that is the summary of the *prakṛtis*.' It has been suggested however that it means: 'The *rāja* and the *rājya*: that is the essence of the *prakṛtis*.'²⁸ Evidence adduced and capable of being adduced is the dual number in the title (*rāja* and *rājya*) and a reference by Kāmandaki to *rāja* and *rājya* as two units.²⁹ This passage, however, does not suggest that the two units constitute a summary or essence of the *prakṛtis* and the conventional translation is preferable. The chapter of the *Arthaśāstra* thus introduced compares the effects on government of different sorts of king. To begin with, the statement 'The king is *rājya*' is quite natural, as it emphasizes the importance of the sort of king a country has.

But this does not mean, as it has often been taken to mean, that the identification of king with *rājya* means 'L'état, c'est moi.' *Rājya* does not mean 'etat'.³⁰ The passage means that the entire business of upholding government rests on the king, and by implication stresses the qualifications of a king that are to be discussed. It is not a manifesto for absolutism, and it is not evidence of the existence of organized totalitarian states in ancient India.

King's Authority Not Legitimized by Constitutions

The discussion so far has been of the meanings of words. It has, however, implications beyond semantics, because it helps to show what ideas existed and what ideas didn't. If in practice there had been states consisting of identifiable territory, with constitutions applying to the territory and regulating the institutions that operated within it, but confining their

legitimacy to the area that constituted the states, then we would expect to find in the literature words that mean some of these things. What we find is a set of words reflecting an entirely different situation. Kings, we need not doubt, were able to establish their authority in particular areas and not outside them; but the authority was not legitimized by constitutions that applied to the areas. It was legitimized by the fact that the kings were successfully performing their function as *kṣhatriyas*; they were fighting, and by their success establishing their claims to *rāja-dharma* or *kṣhatriyadharma*, their claims to be judges over wrongdoers and to be representatives of divine harmony.

¹On Yāj 1.366.

²Rm 2.67.2.

³See *ibid.* 2.2, and A.S. Altekar, *State and Government in Ancient India* (Delhi, 1958), p. 82.

⁴A.Ś. 13.4.5. *Na hy ajano janapado rājyam ajanapadam vā bhavati.*

⁵R.S. Sharma, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India* (Delhi, 1959), p. 21.

⁶U.N. Ghoshal, *A History of Indian Political Ideas* (Bombay, 1959), p. 552.

⁷P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra* (Poona, 1930–1956), vol. 3, p. 19.

⁸R.C.P. Singh, *Kingship in Northern India, c. 600 A.D.–1200 A.D.* (London Ph.D. thesis, 1957), pp. 46–49.

⁹J.J. Anjaria, *Political Obligation in the Hindu State* (Calcutta, 1935), pp. 110ff.

¹⁰V.P. Varma, in the *Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society*, vol. 38, pp. 45ff; and R.P. Kangle, *op. cit.* vol. Z, p. 45 in.

¹¹As does P.V. Kane, *loc. cit.*

¹²Mn. 7.111.

¹³A.Ś. 6.1.1. *Svāmyamātya-janapada-durga-kośa-daṇḍa-mitrāṇi.*

¹⁴Mn. 9.294. *Svāmyamātyau puram rāṣṭram kośa-daṇḍau sulṭi tathā.*

¹⁵Yāj. 1.349. As the A.Ś. but with *jana*, not *janapada*.

¹⁶Vi. 3.33 *Durga* for 'city' *rāṣṭra* for 'land.'

¹⁷*Amarakośa* 2, *kṣatriyavarga*, 18 (p. 125).

¹⁸E.g. Mbh. 12.69.64–65; Matsya 220.19.

¹⁹Mbh. 12.122.8.

²⁰A.Ś. 8.1.

²¹A.Ś. 8.1.41.

²²Agni 239.2.

²³See R.S. Sharma, *op. cit.*, p. 22, and A.S. Altekar, *loc. cit.*

²⁴Kām 4.1–2.

²⁵Matsya. 220.47.

²⁶E.G. Mn. 9.296–297; Kām 15.1–2.

²⁷A.Ś. 8.2.1.

²⁸U.N. Ghoshal *op. cit.*, p. 127, n. 7.

²⁹Kām 15.1–2.

³⁰This follows R.P. Kangle, *loc. cit.*

CHAPTER IV

FOREIGN RELATIONS

The area of influence of a king may be regarded as a series of concentric circles. At the centre is the capital or fortress (*durga*), where there are the palace and the headquarters of the administration. Around this there is a rural area which may be large or small and which may contain provincial towns or fortresses. Around this in turn are the border regions which shade into the hilly or wooded areas inhabited by wild tribes (*āṭavikas*) or into the territory of a neighbouring king. And beyond this in turn are the adjacent territories themselves, whether tribal or monarchical. Neighbours may be the king's friends or enemies, and they may regard him as an equal, as a vassal or as an overlord. If the last, then the neighbouring territories come under his influence to some degree and yield tribute.

Rājya, Not a Territorial State

This is a fairly uncontroversial description of the pattern which the sources suggest. It leaves open the question whether a kingdom was thought of as a territorial unit with boundaries, an inside and an outside, or not. A further examination of the *śāstra* literature will show that it was not. No distinction was made between 'home' and 'foreign' policy as we understand them. 'Inside' and 'outside' applied not so much to an area of territory as to the activities of a king's government. There was not a kingdom with definable frontiers, a constitution that gave a government its legitimacy, and a set of laws that applied within the frontiers and not beyond them. Instead there was an arena in which a number of kings or would-be kings asserted their claims to dominion. These claims were not confined to specific areas by their nature. Each successful contestant had a sphere of direct influence, in which he was able to establish his followers and collect taxes, that can be called his kingdom. He also had a set of relations with the other contestants—relations of hostility or alliance, subordination or suzerainty.

This is a discussion of ideas only, an interpretation of the way people thought about their political activities and institutions. It may throw a little light on actual behaviour: the picture presented above is an intelligible background for phenomena such as endemic warfare, palace

intrigue and the rapid rise and fall of empires that characterize the Indian scene.

Our examination of the meaning of *rājya* in the previous chapter is enough to create a presumption that the divisions were between royal liveries, not territorial states, and further investigation will confirm it. *Rājya* does not mean a territorial state or kingdom. It means the condition or activity of a *rāja*, his status in ritual, the loyalty of his following, the work of his administration. We therefore expect to find that claims to authority were not confined by theoretically definable boundaries, that every other king was a threat, that rival claimants with their factions were to be struggled with in the home territory.

This is not to say that in practice there were no territorial boundaries. It is to say nothing about actual practice at all. A king's area of tax-gathering, dam-building and general administrative influence had a perimeter that might be more or less clearly defined. There were border guards or garrisons on the outskirts of the controlled area. There was at least in theory a superintendent of seals who issued passports for a fixed price.¹ These passports were to be checked *in situ* by the superintendent of pastures as a visitor entered the kingdom. Clearly for practical purposes it was useful to speak of 'inside' and 'outside' with a territorial application.

Meaning of Terms 'Inside' and 'Outside'

But consider the distinction made in the *Arthaśāstra* between internal and external troubles.² Internal troubles include defection by the crown prince, a minister, the royal chaplain, the general, and so forth—that is, members of the king's entourage. External troubles include defection of a provincial governor, a border guard, a chief of wild tribes or a conquered king. Here the line between the inside and outside of the kingdom is blurred. The terms seem to be applied to the ruling group, not the constitutional boundaries, of a kingdom.

Foreign Policy Related to Potential Enemies

Where foreign policy is discussed, the relationships in question are chiefly those with other kings who are seen as potential enemies. Six elements of foreign policy, the *ṣaḍguṇya*, were recognized. These as listed by the *Arthaśāstra* were agreement or peace (*sandhi*), hostility (*vigraha*), indifference (*āsana*), preparation or attack (*yāna*), refuge with a powerful king (*samsraya*), and 'duality' (*dvaidhībhāva*, which has been interpreted as meaning peace in one quarter and war in another, or as division of the army).³

Fusion of Home and Foreign Affairs

The *Arthaśāstra* also declares that success for a king depends on the use of the *śaktis*, and these in turn depend on the *guṇas* (just listed).⁴ These *śaktis* are the powers of counsel, might, and the king's bravery.⁵ There are three 'successes' corresponding to the use of the three *śaktis*. Also mentioned in various sources are the four *upāyas*, means.⁶ The four normally mentioned are agreement or conciliation (*sāma*), tribute or bribery (*dāna*), sowing dissension (*bheda*) and force (*daṇḍa*, to which a chapter is devoted below, or *bala*). What is significant is that these techniques are mentioned not only in what we would recognize as foreign policy, but also in dealing with problems that arise within the kingdom. Again we see the fusion of home and foreign affairs.

Peace, a Means to an End

All other kings were seen as potential enemies; an attitude of cynicism pervades the science of polity generally.⁷ 'Nobody is the friend or enemy of anybody else. Friends and enemies are made by wealth.'⁸ Peace (*sandhi*) was treated not as a natural or desirable condition so much as a means to an end. As we saw it was classed as one of the four means, and it was divided in turn into friendship, mutual assistance, union and tribute.⁹ There were twenty categories of persons with whom alliance should not be made.¹⁰

Military Strategy, Part of Dharma

Military strategy occupies a great part of the *Arthaśāstra*. It deserves to be emphasised that attacking one's enemies was not seen as an activity separate from the management of the kingdom; it was, above all, what secured the king on his own throne. It was part of his moral duty, *rāja-dharma*, to fight. 'As a snake swallows mice lying in holes, so the earth swallows these two: a king who does not fight and a *brāhmaṇa* who does not go on a pilgrimage.'¹¹ Manu and Yājñavalkya say that kings dying in battle go straight to heaven.¹² The *Mahābhārata* says that *kṣatriyas*, men of the noble or warrior class, are purified when they die in battle.¹³

Every King an Emperor in Making

Every king is thought of as an emperor in the making. The *Arthaśāstra* constantly refers to the hypothetical king to whom it is addressed as 'the one desirous of conquest' (*vijigīṣu*). Kāmandaki gives this definition of a good king: he is to be endowed with the constituents (of *rājya*—the *prakṛtis* already discussed), of great prowess, energetic, and striving for

victory.¹⁴ The king is to win for himself power and success, and damage those of his enemy.

Empire of Glory, Not of Square Miles

Yet, despite the cynicism and self-interest which it is easy to see in the discussions of policy, specifications of the duties of conquerors are chiefly notable for their mildness to vanquished kings. This is in accord with the assumption, which the investigation of the *maṇḍala* theory below will confirm, that the king's object was not to create a territorial empire but to secure himself against the other kings in the area by conquest and diplomacy. It was an empire of glory, not an empire of square miles. The Jūnāgaḍh inscription refers to Rudradāman as the establisher of kings who had lost their kingdoms.^{14a} The *Arthaśāstra* counsels kings not to covet the territory, wealth, sons and wives of other kings; they are to reinstate kinsmen of defeated rivals on the throne or install the losers' sons; otherwise the circle of kings in the region is provoked.¹⁵ Yājñavalkya says that the king should protect a conquered territory as if it were his own and respect its customs.¹⁶ According to the *Mahābhārata* a conqueror is to place on the throne a brother, son or grandson of the conquered king, or a daughter.¹⁷

Overlordship, Not Annexation

If throne, wealth and territory were excluded from the objects of conquest, it is natural to suppose that another motive might operate, the desire for homage and the promise of support. Manu says that a king should seek countries that he has not acquired and protect them once they are obtained.¹⁸ That this is not considered by the author to imply annexation is suggested by the specific warning not to seize conquered lands.¹⁹ Remissions are to be granted, an amnesty is to be offered, a relative of the former king is to be installed on the throne. There need be no contradiction here; a land that has been conquered and treated in this way may still be held to be possessed and protected if the new king there acknowledges the conqueror's overlordship. War may be required for annexation, but annexation does not necessarily follow war.

Conquest for Glory

The place of *dharma* in conquest is discussed in some places. In the *Mahābhārata* it is said that conquest is to be made according to *dharma*.²⁰ Aśoka's thirteenth edict describes his conquests as conquests by *dharma*.²¹ The object of conquest could be seen as prestige only. A significant passage in the *Raghuvamśa* says that good kings desired conquest only for fame.²²

The *Arthaśāstra* lists three types of conquest (*vijaya*) : *dharmavijaya*, which involves the submission of the conquered king, *lobhavijaya*, which involves the appropriation of land and wealth, and *asuravijaya*, which involves the taking of his son, wife and life.²³

Mandala Theory of International Relations

The inference from such evidence as this that empire was constituted by the submission of surrounding kings, who were thought of as rivals for the unique status of lord over the people of the area, rather than as opposite numbers 'outside' the kingdom, is supported by the view of foreign relations represented in the *maṇḍala* theory which has been propounded in several sources.²⁴ *Maṇḍala* means 'circle,' and refers to the circle or orbit of kings and their governments (*rājyas*) around the hypothetical king who is to be advised, the 'one desirous of conquest.' He is compared to the axle of the wheel, and his circle of allies (separated from him by enemies) to the rim.²⁵ He is the point of reference. A neighbour fronting him is hostile (*ari*); the king beyond is hostile to the *ari* and therefore a friend (*mitra*) of the *vijigīṣu*; this arrangement produces an alternation of friend and enemy along the line drawn from the centre : *ari*, *mitra*, *arimitra* (enemy's friend), *mitramitra*, *arimitramitra*. A similar alternation extends in the rear : *pārṣṇigrāha*, *ākrānda*, *pārṣṇigrāhāsāra*, *ākrāndāsāra*. Two other categories are the neutral (*madhyama*), who is adjacent to but not beyond the enemy, and the *udāsīna* who is a powerful king indifferent to the issue of war. What is being described is the logic of the king's interest, whereby a neighbour is automatically a rival and the stakes are the submission of the whole *maṇḍala*.

To study this subject in the modern literature is to become familiar with diagrams representing the *maṇḍala* schematically by a hypothetical map of countries with squiggly frontiers for verisimilitude. This form of representation demands that in each circle round the *vijigīṣu* all those countries in one arc of 180° are drawn from the list of forward categories, and those in the other from the list of rearward categories. Yet the standard here for distinguishing forward and rearward is quite arbitrary. There is no reason evident from the diagram itself why the *vijigīṣu* should face in any particular direction. There seems to be a contradiction too between the term *maṇḍala*, a circle, and the categories of friend and enemy actually designated, all but two of which fit onto a straight line.

The difficulty is created by the assumption that the *maṇḍala* is geographical and even cartographical.

It is not. The units in the *maṇḍala* are not areas but governments. The orientation implied is related to the dimensions not of space but

of politics, and diplomacy, as the contexts of references to the theory suggest. Thus the forward direction is that of any neighbour the *vijigīṣu* is planning at a given moment to deal with.

Chakravartin

A non-geographical circle, a *chakra*, appears also in the ancient myth of the *chakravartin* or wheel-turner. It refers to the highest ideal offered to a king, the ideal of universal dominion. In the *Maitrī Upaniṣad* seventeen ancient *chakravartins* are named.²⁶ In the *Sāmavidhāna Brāhmaṇa* it is said: 'The priest is to perform the coronation ceremony with the *ekavṛṣa sāman* for a king whom he desires to be sole ruler and whose circle of territory he does not want to be overwhelmed.'²⁷ Circles appear also in inscriptions: '*apatihatacakasa*'²⁸—'whose circle of territory is unsubdued.' The *Arthaśāstra* describes the empire of the *chakravartin* as territory a thousand leagues across and bounded by the Himalayas and the ocean.²⁹

Buddhism knew the idea too and it is said that a *chakkavatti* is a righteous king of righteousness.³⁰ Here the virtues of protection are described. This is not obviously an ideal of a political empire, and it is not clear that the brahmanical authorities had in mind the political control of annexed territories.

The *chakra* appears to be similar to the *maṇḍala*, which is a circle of kings. If they were all deposed, the *chakra* or *maṇḍala* would thereby cease to exist. If on the other hand they all gave homage to the *vijigīṣu*, and called themselves his feudatories, it could be said that it was his *dharma*, his righteousness, causing the *chakra* to turn. The ideal of the *chakravartin* may thus in a sense mean an ideal of Indian unity, but this was to be no more a political unity than that of mediaeval Europe under successive Popes.

King with Followers rather than a Territory

The conclusions from the discussion are these. The claims of kings to authority overlapped. They were all in competition with each other, and conquest seemed necessary to a king's security. The purpose of conquest was not to add territory to lands under a king's administrative control but to obtain clients among the surrounding kings. The ideal was to be acknowledged as lord by them all. The arena contained competing kings and would-be kings rather than territorial states, and there was no concept of countries having constitutions and laws and circumscribed by frontiers. Thus the important political unit was a king with his followers rather than a territory, and it was to the king's party that the terms 'inside' and 'outside' apply.

Institutions Different from Ours

To say these things is not to make any moral judgments. It is not to scorn the ancient Indians for having primitive institutions, and it is not to whitewash the warlike behaviour of kings. It is simply to say that they had institutions different from ours and therefore had different ideas about them, ideas that do not fit neatly into our political categories.

NOTES

¹A.Ś. 2.34.

²ibid. 9.3.12, 22. Literally the terms mean 'inside vexation' and 'outside vexation.' R.P. Kangle translates as 'the interior' and 'outer regions.'

³ibid. 7.1.2, 6–12.

⁴ibid. 6.2.34.

⁵ibid. 6.2.33.

⁶Eg. Yāj. 1.342; Mbh. 12.69.23.

⁷See, Eg. A.Ś. 12.2–5; 13.5; 5.1.5–7; Mbh. 12.128.20–27; 12.138.13ff; Kām. 18.1.

⁸Mbh. 12.136.104; cp. Kām. 8.52.

⁹Kām. 9.20–21. *Maitra, parasparopakara, sambandhaja and upahāra.*

¹⁰ibid. 9.23–26.

¹¹Mbh. 12.23.15.

¹²Mn. 7.89; Yāj. 1.320.

¹³Mbh. 12.79.30.

¹⁴Kām. 8.6.

^{14a}C.I.I. vol. 8. p. 44

¹⁵A.S. 7.16.30.

¹⁶Yāj. 1.338–339.

¹⁷Mbh. 12.34.31–33.

¹⁸Mn. 9.251.

¹⁹ibid. 7.201–203.

²⁰Mbh. 12.97.1–2.

²¹R.E. 13 (pp. 28f, line 12)

²²Rag. 1.7.

²³A.Ś. 12.1.10.

²⁴Mn. 7.154–159; Kām. 8; A.Ś. 6.2.

²⁵A.Ś. 6.2. 39.

²⁶Maitri Up. 1.4.

²⁷Sām. Br. 3.5.2.

²⁸A.S.W.I. vol. 5, p. 60, line 2.

²⁹A.S. 9.1.17–18.

³⁰Angut. Nik. 5.133.1. *Cakkavatti dhammiko dhammarāja.*

CHAPTER V

BUREAUCRACY

Here, as in the case of so many aspects of ancient Indian political and social life, we do not know the answers in any clear and definite terms to the most important questions that arise. How efficiently did government departments operate? How much palm-greasing went on? What was the relationship between royal servants and the public? How much co-operation was there between departments? Was a bureaucracy an élite? Did its members cluster in groups fashioned by caste or district loyalties? Were such groups in competition with each other? Did officials in the middle and lower levels take sides in dynastic disputes? How was promotion granted? How far was the royal service a field for clientage and patronage? It is questions such as these that should engage our attention when we turn to the subject of bureaucracy. Though of course fruitful speculation is possible with regard to some of these questions, they cannot be easily answered to throw light on bureaucracy of the ancient Indian kingdoms in general or of any particular times and places.

No Organized Bureaucracies

The purpose of this chapter is partly historiographical and partly historical. It is to suggest that the chief Sanskrit text on politics, the *Arthaśāstra*, is not evidence of the existence of any highly organized bureaucracies. And it is also to suggest that the bureaucracies that existed are likely to have been very different in kind from what they are normally presumed to be.

Two Types

It is important to make a distinction between two ways of classifying kingdoms by their governments, or the discussion of administration will be fogged. We can look at the type of formal structure they had, or we can look at the degree to which decisions were effectively made at the centre and carried out in the towns and villages, the degree to which control by the central government was real.

The formal structure might or might not provide for a class of full-time officials in the king's employment to carry out the decisions of government. We can call such a class a bureaucracy, and this is one distinct sense

in which the word can be used. An alternative type of formal structure is one in which decisions are put into effect by being transmitted along a chain of group or community chiefs. We might imagine, for example, that a decision is taken at a meeting of the king with various clan seniors, who then disperse to their villages and convey the decision to ward heads or lineage elders—whatever terminology we may use. Intermediate structures are possible, in which community leaders or aristocrats are retained at court by the king and are provided for from taxation.

It is one thing to describe the structure. It is quite another to say how far the processes of government are actually controlled from the centre (whether by king, oligarchy or public assembly). Especially in a small community, government by co-operation between group leaders may be highly organized and efficient. It is unlikely to be despotic, determined by the whim of a king, but it is possible to imagine that decisions arrived at by an assembly of chiefs might be effectively carried out.

Equally, government through a class of full-time officials may be highly disorganized and inefficient. Most of them may have got their positions by the favour of senior officials or ministers, and these dignitaries may be the scions of powerful houses whom the king ignores at his peril. Officials may support themselves by graft, and may find innumerable reasons for postponing the execution of the king's orders, or distorting them in transmission, or declaring them to be impractical. They may pass into the king's treasury only a small part of the fines and taxes that they levy. Their interest in their positions, and their behaviour, may be entirely determined by the politics of local caste groups. In such a situation the king's seal may be no more than a symbol by which a number of local political institutions (villages, caste groups, aristocratic liveries) bears the guise of a single unifying institution, the office of kingship.

Thus either form of structure may in practice be either highly organized or highly disorganized, and in either the subjects may or may not feel the heavy hand of government upon them. Now the word 'bureaucratic' is often used to mean 'highly organized', implying that a bureaucratic state is one where a despot is able to make his subjects bend to his will at the stroke of a pen. This then is a different meaning of the word.

Consensus Regarding Organized Bureaucracy

There is something of a consensus among historians that ancient India knew bureaucracies in this second sense, that, especially in the India of the *Arthasāstra*, hordes of officials translated the decisions of government into action with diligence and professional skill. 'Control,'

'organization,' 'centralization'—it is terms such as these that most readily characterize the conventional view.

This view finds its chief support in the *Arthaśāstra*, and partly in Megasthenes' description of India. The former, a complete and original work of its class and traditionally attributed to Kauṭilya or Kauṭalya, came to light only early in the present century, and has proved an invaluable mine of information about ancient political institutions. That it was regarded as an authoritative manual of polity in many times and places is suggested by its importance in having supplanted such other works on government as may have existed before it, and are referred to in it. (It should be noted however that F. Wilhelm has argued that some of the authorities cited in the text had no existence outside it, and were introduced for rhetorical reasons.¹) Various inscriptions of later times refer to the *adhyakṣapracāra*, apparently referring to its section on departmental organization.²

A Typical Śāstra

But it is not an empirical description of actual administrations. It is a highly stylised piece of rule-making, and on this score has been called a typical *śāstra*.³ Its prescriptions seem to be ideal rather than practical, and the difficulties of historical reconstruction from it have not been missed by historians.⁴

It is remarkable for its detailed discussion of the whole range of political activity. Foreign relations are exhaustively analysed and classified. A great part of it is taken up with discussions of military strategy. At every point technical information abounds. The administration of justice, including the appointment of judges, procedure at trials, and punishments, is examined at length. The early training of the king, and the way he should treat his family, his heirs, his ministers, and all others around him, are explained. And on the subject of the administration of government, a series of chapters explains the duties of a range of overseers or supervisors (*adhyakṣas*) with departmental functions. There are technical discussions of the preparation of beverages within the purview of the liquor-shop supervisor and of the goldsmith's craft in the mint. A chapter describes the appointments as well as the organization of the archives; other chapters set out the duties of the superintendent of seals or passports and declare the salaries appropriate to all grades of government official, including the lowliest workmen and members of the king's household. The structure of regional and local administration is explained. In the countryside there is a hierarchy of officials, with grades responsible for stated numbers of villages. This is paralleled in the city.

Other Sources

The *Arthaśāstra* is not the only source of information about such matters as these, though it is much the fullest on most topics, especially administration. The *smṛtis* in general confirm the impression that the *Arthaśāstra* gives that a lot of thought went into the science of politics and that elaborate structures of government were known. It is possible to put together from a variety of sources, including inscriptions, a fairly coherent account of the functions allotted to the organs of government.

Outstanding Dignitaries at the Centre

Around the king stood certain outstanding dignitaries whose counsels guided the course of the kingdom. Prominent is the *purohita*, the royal chaplain, who seems to have been at his most powerful in early times. In the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* he is described as the herdsman of the kingdom.⁵ He was able to influence the fortunes of society through the supernatural effects of his ritual performances, according to the conventional myth. Even the 'secular' *Arthaśāstra* says that he has the power to remove calamities both divine and human.⁶ His political power was great. As the king's right-hand man he was to be consulted after everybody else on matters relating to divine and human affairs. The *Arthaśāstra* awards him the same pay as a minister of the highest rank (*mantrin*), and he is described as such by Vijñāneśvara.⁷ He was to be honoured as a pupil honours his teacher, a son his father, or a servant his master.⁸ His qualifications are set out in various places⁹; he is to be well versed in the Vedas, in *dharmaśāstra*, in astrology, and in various propitiatory rites, and should be born of a high family.¹⁰ Yet even the *purohita*, for a great offence, could be imprisoned or banished.¹¹

The considerable rank of the *senāpati* (general, commander-in-chief) is attested by his salary and by his status among the *ratnins* and *tīrthas*. The *senāpati* was not necessarily a *kṣatriya*. *Purāṇa* sources say that he should be either a *brāhmaṇa* or a *kṣatriya*.¹² The *Mānasollāsa* says that he should be of good family, courageous, versed in languages, skilled with horses, elephants, weapons, omens and medicine, and full of virtues like liberality and restraint.¹³ *Senāpatīs* were aristocrats or great men of the land rather than mere officers. One inscription, for example, lists the *senāpati* between the *purohita* and the crown prince.¹⁴ Such a context seems to place him in the king's household. The fusion of state office and the royal household, that we noticed in its embryo in the Vedic *ratnins*, is reflected also in the way the crown prince (*yuvarāja*) is often named alongside ministers.

Provincial Officials

The *gopa* was in charge of five or ten villages¹⁵; he was to register all tax-payers and exemptees and keep a record of cultivators, merchants, trades and professions, and livestock, among a number of other things. The *gopa* in the city was in charge of ten, twenty or forty families.¹⁶ It is here as much as anywhere else that the *Arthaśāstra* appears to depict a bureaucratic state.

The *sthānika* was in charge of a tax district in the kingdom.¹⁷ His duties were similar to those of a *gopa*. In the city he was in charge of one of the four wards.¹⁸

A kingdom was divided into provinces called *rāṣṭras*. According to the *Amarakoṣa*, *rāṣṭra*, *deśa*, *viṣaya* and *janapada* are synonymous, but usage shows several variations. A Chalukya grant lists officials in charge of *rāṣṭras*, *viṣayas* and villages in that order, suggesting that *viṣaya* was a lesser division,¹⁹ but elsewhere *viṣaya* precedes *rāṣṭra*.²⁰ Other regional divisions known are *bhukti*, *bhoga*, and *āhāra*.²¹ The subject has been studied in various places.²²

The *Arthaśāstra* says that a group of ten villages is a *samgrahaṇa*; of two hundred, a *khārvaṭika*; of four hundred, a *dronamukha*; in the midst of eight hundred is a *sthāniya*. Each group has a chief town or fort.²³

Parallel with these divisions is a hierarchy of officials. Officers for one village, ten, twenty, a hundred and a thousand are mentioned by Manu and Agni.²⁴

Inscriptional information is available about the Gupta administration.²⁵ Provincial governors called *uparikas* were appointed by the emperor.²⁶ Regional officers, *viṣayapatis*, were often *kumārāmātyas*, a term which may have been a designation of honour and worth. These, at least in one particular district, had under them a committee of four, consisting of the *nagaraśreṣṭhin* (banker), *sārthavāha* (chief merchant), *prathamakulika* (chief of craft guilds), and *prathamakāyastha* (chief of scribes).

The most important officer in a village was the *grāmika* or headman. The terms *grāmakūṭa* and *grāmin* are also found, but they are not synonyms. It appears that the *grāmakūṭa* could be a grantee who enjoyed the revenue of a village.²⁷ From early time there appears a *grāmin*, a *brāhmaṇa* distinct from the *grāmaṇī*, and has been held to be a grantee enjoying revenue.²⁸

Most police work was done by spies. Other officials with police functions existed. A *chauroddhartṛ*, or thief-catcher, is mentioned in various inscriptions.²⁹ *Caṭas* and *bhaṭas* appear but their functions are obscure.

Also figuring in grants are *daṇḍapāśikas*, *daṇḍikas* and *chauroddharāṇikas*.³⁰ The *Arthaśāstra* has several references. The superintendent of pastures was to guard against thieves, protect merchant caravans, and watch over cattle.³¹ Similar responsibilities are mentioned by Yājñavalkya in much the same way, including apprehension of murderers, between sundry officials.³² Three chapters of the *Arthaśāstra* describe detection and interrogation.³³

Seals were needed for entering or leaving a country.³⁴ According to the *Arthaśāstra*, the superintendent of pastures was to warn of the approach of thieves and enemies by means of smoke, fire and carrier pigeons. Garrisons were supposed to be stationed at intervals through the countryside. Manu says that there should be a garrison in the midst of two, three or five villages.³⁵ An officer called the *corarajjuka* was to catch thieves and give compensation for merchandise stolen between villages.³⁶

Existence of Organized Governments

Now, all this information, much of it from the *Arthaśāstra*, adds up to a formidable compendium of administrative science. We might suppose that the *Arthaśāstra*, and a large number of other sources, to the extent that they share its nature, demonstrate the existence of elaborate and highly organized governments.

To say that it is an ideal that need not have been realized in practice is not quite good enough. The model or ideal represented in the *Arthaśāstra* would not have seemed important, would not have established itself as a standard authority, would not have called itself the science of politics, if it had existed in a vacuum, unrelated to what governments were actually attempting. Certain terms, such as titles of officers, that occur in inscriptions are often the same as the designations given in the *Arthaśāstra*. Perhaps all kings did not have all the levels and departments of administration in their governments that the text prescribes; perhaps some of them had only half or a quarter: but still it is to be presumed that the pattern of real governments was very frequently on the same general lines as that of the theoretical model.

Thus we can treat the *Arthaśāstra* and the other sources as historical evidence. In fact, we can treat them as historical evidence of the existence of bureaucracies as a standard form of administrative structure—but bureaucracies strictly in the sense of classes of full-time officials maintained by public funds.

It is no part of the claims made here to deny this. But, unless a distinction between different senses of 'bureaucracy' is made, it is all too easy to

draw from the evidence an inference that is not warranted, that is, that the sources are evidence of the existence of highly organized, controlled, centralized governments.

Evidence Only of Formal Structure

We can classify governments by their degree of central control or by the typology of their formal structure. The *Arthaśāstra* explicitly and usefully describes a formal structure. It says nothing explicitly about the degree of central control that characterized real governments at the time.

Certainly, the structure itself provides channels for the transmission of orders from the centre. There were messengers, heralds, proclamations drawn up according to an exact procedure. There were means of checking up on the execution of orders through spies. There is an assumption that, to the extent that a king was successful in his job, he achieved relative control—if he achieved more control than other kings he was more successful. But to say all this is only to describe the structure of administration on which kings modelled their governments. There is no way of establishing from this the degrees of success that were actually achieved. The structure of the United Nations Organization is not evidence of the degree of unity among its members. There is therefore no explicit evidence about the degrees of organization that characterised Indian kingdoms, no explicit evidence of the existence of bureaucracies in the other sense.

Absence of Effective Control

But there is implicit evidence of the absence of bureaucracies in this other sense, of the absence of effective control and organization. There are suggestions that officials were highly unreliable, that funds did not flow as they should, that government positions were rewards for service and a means of giving rewards in turn to clients, that royal servants were feared not because they were carrying out the king's instructions but because they were abusing them. What suggests this is the preoccupation with insecurity, with disloyalty, and with corruption that the texts reveal.

Preoccupation with Insecurity

Fear of risings was a constant bugbear, and precautions against assassination have been thoroughly dealt with by our authorities. The threat to Indian kings was intimate, being built into the atmosphere of intrigue and the rivalry of relatives and nobles. The emphasis on reliability in all grades of service is evidence of this. The phenomenally high salaries

for top jobs listed in the *Arthaśāstra* are to secure loyalty.³⁷ Another chapter very significantly declares that a king needs to secure himself against sons and wives first, and against enemies afterwards.³⁸ Poison appears to have been the greatest fear, elaborate precautions being detailed by various authorities.³⁹ Manu describes precautions to be taken with food, incantations to be spoken over it, and antidotes to poisoning.⁴⁰ In particular, the need to be able to trust women near the king is dwelt on.

Preoccupation with Secrecy

The preoccupation with secrecy is graphically illustrated by the concern shown for security at council meetings. The fear has been expressed that secrets might be given away by persons talking in sleep or in repetition by birds or animals, of which several species are listed.⁴¹ It has been stated that disclosure of secrets may be detected by scientific study of the demeanour and conduct of officials. Fearsome punishments are prescribed. This sort of preoccupation may be a pointer to the prevalence of intrigue. Spying was endemic. Espionage was a science in its own right. The *Arthaśāstra* in two chapters has plenty to say on the subject.⁴² Types of spies listed are the pupil, ascetic, householder, trader, classmate (?—*sattrin*), rough, poisoner and nun. The first few are the superior organizing classes of spy. They are used in the testing of ministers with temptations. The others, who are wandering spies, are to get intelligence from all quarters. Evidence of the king's distrust of people round the throne is the provision that the last class (nun) is to spy on dignitaries and visit the families of high officers. Information given by spies such as actors, dancers and singers is to be tested by the senior spies and verified by others. If there is conflict between the different sources, secret punishment is to be meted out.

We are told that spies are to act as *agents provocateurs*⁴³; men inclined to robbery or adultery are to be shown up by spies. In one chapter the *Arthaśāstra* describes some of the spies' functions⁴⁴: they are to pretend to take sides in public debate about the government's virtues, inducing other people to reveal their views; they are to report rumours and signs of discontent (a function they are often shown exercising in drama); and they are to bring round the disaffected by the standard diplomatic methods of liberality, division and punishment.

Thin Distinction Between Espionage and Civil Service

The various uses to which spies were put may be noted. They were frequently used in the pursuit of foreign policy. Relevant here are the

functions of the envoy or ambassador, who was regarded as a glorified spy.⁴⁵ Spies figure prominently in the battle of intrigue against a stronger king described in the *Arthaśāstra*,⁴⁶ and in intrigue against small kingless communities.⁴⁷ We also find them spying on the work of various officials, detecting those living above their means or falsifying accounts,⁴⁸ and acting as income tax inspectors, assessing the productivity of fields.⁴⁹ There is no clear distinction between espionage and civil service.

Spies as King's Eyes and Arms

Spies were used in the army. We are told in the *Mahābhārata* that Krishna had spies in Duryodhana's army.⁵⁰ Spies were used everywhere, and their prime function was to bring intelligence of corruption, sedition and trends of popular feeling to the king. At many places they are described as the king's eyes.⁵¹ They were also his arms and had executive functions. The *Arthaśāstra*, discussing the business of keeping law and order,⁵² shows how the *samāhartṛ* is to employ spies against judges and superintendents taking bribes, counterfeiters, adulterers, thieves, robbers, and so forth. The decision at a trial may be determined by the evidence of spies. A spy's job was a very responsible one and *Kāmandaki* requires high qualifications: a spy should be able to read thoughts and have a good memory, endurance, wit and speed.⁵³

The abundant references to espionage and the large part it played in the science of government are, like the rest of the administrative prescriptions, part of the description of a formal system, and it would be wrong to use this material as evidence of degrees of success in bringing the working of the system under central control. We are not entitled to conclude that there was, for example, more spying going on than there is today. This may well be the case, but the inference can only be conjectural. We are not entitled to conclude that espionage was actually used successfully to combat disaffection and graft. What we are entitled to conclude is that the dangers which espionage was intended to avoid were a serious worry and a constant problem. That is, subversion and corruption were taken for granted as part of the political scene.

Corruption

Female spies were sent to visit the families of ministers. The *Arthaśāstra* in several places uses the word *ahārya*, 'incorruptible,' in describing the qualifications desirable in high officials. Ministers were to be paid high salaries to keep them loyal. They were known to scheme for the throne themselves. A host of scraps such as these adds up to convincing testimony to the prevalence of corruption. The *Arthaśāstra* in one chapter

describes the various tests by which people in high office are submitted to temptations of various kinds.⁵⁴ Temptations directly relating to the king or a queen are not approved of.

In another chapter are prescribed severe corporal punishments for concealing revenue,⁵⁵ and much has been said on fraud by goldsmiths.⁵⁶ Manu in a classification of thieves as open and secret includes people who take bribes and high officers in the "open" category.⁵⁷ Many parts of the *Arthaśāstra* are permeated by the assumption of corruption on the part of officers,⁵⁸ provided for as something to be reckoned with as a matter of course like the passing of the seasons. Embezzlement was well known. Various fines for fraud in the archives office are laid down in the chapter on its organization.⁵⁹ One chapter lists no fewer than forty types of embezzlement.⁶⁰ The *samāhartṛ* and the *pradeśṭṛ*s are in charge of the superintendents in their departments with responsibility to check the stealing of valuables, on pain of death.⁶¹ A severe penalty may indicate a common crime that is difficult to detect. The same authority says that it is impossible to know exactly when officers extract wealth, just as fish in the water cannot be observed when they drink.⁶² Men are of fickle nature, like horses. Superintendents need to be supervised. The army is to have many heads, because from fear of each other they are less likely to be suborned by the enemy.⁶³

There is provision for spies on judges as well as on all manner of officials.⁶⁴ Elsewhere punishment is laid down for judges who threaten, browbeat, or send out witnesses, or arbitrarily abuse, silence or otherwise treat unfairly the litigants.⁶⁵ Magistrates were thought to be liable to corruption. Punishment is prescribed for them when they take bribes or give unjust decisions.⁶⁶ In the *Daśakumāracharita* a character says that judges decide suits as they please after taking bribes.⁶⁷

The picture we have from such allusions, since they are so numerous, is of an administration that will succeed, if it can, in spite of the king's servants rather than because of them, by the appeal of the king's glory and personality, over the heads of the officials, directly to the people. It is assumed that those who serve him are untrustworthy. 'Those who have the qualifications for high ministers are to be appointed according to their ability over the various departments; the king should constantly inspect their work, since men are by nature fickle and when employed in works show changeable temper like horses.'⁶⁸ Yājñavalkya says that the king is to protect subjects against scribes, check on officers with spies, honour the honest, punish the corrupt.⁶⁹ Manu has similar rules.⁷⁰ Elsewhere it is said that the king should personally check on revenue and expenditure every day.⁷¹ Medhātithi (a late commentator on Manu)

says that public menaces ('thorns') are usually under the protection of a queen, a prince, the king's favourites or the commander-in-chief.⁷²

Evidence of Lack of State Loyalty

The treatment given by Sanskrit literature to disaffection and graft is thus very different from what we would expect in a work on politics today. The standards, the attitudes, the presuppositions are all different. That the administrative machine should be unreliable is taken almost for granted. What this suggests is that there was something like the situation suggested at the beginning of this chapter, in which a professional bureaucracy is an arena for personal and communal jealousies and ambitions. What the communities were, how officials grouped according to castes or local loyalties or patron-client relations, we do not know in any detail—that is the sort of basic information about ancient society and politics that has not been assembled, and may never be. But we can discern the results of these jealousies and ambitions in the insecurity of government. What we see is that there was no state loyalty transcending the party of the particular king or candidate for the throne that an individual served. There was perhaps little idea of government as a more or less technical job. Officials did things because those things served the interests of the groups to which they belonged, and their own.

Royal Control as an Ideal

But the success of the king was measured by his control of government : this was the ideal. His office, we may infer, was a socially necessary symbol of the interdependence of the groups whose interplay constituted the politics of the kingdom, and the actions of these groups had their legitimacy in the political ideology by being done in the name of a rightful king or of an aspirant to that title. It was a patriarchal ideal in which the king represented the unity of the people in one family, for whose moral welfare he was responsible. In theory, control of the administration was necessary to the discharge of this responsibility, but not as an end in itself. It was necessary as a sign that everybody acknowledged his divinely appointed authority. If everybody acknowledged him, the supernatural laws of moral cause and effect would see to it that the subjects were righteous and carried out their moral duties.

This speculation is simply an attempt to interpret the ideas implicit in the mythology of politics. There is no suggestion that they governed people's behaviour. The point is simply that they help us to see how royal control of the government should figure as the ideal, in a situation where officials were boyars and communal autonomy was strong.

NOTES

- ¹F. Wilhelm, *Politische Polemiker im Staatslehrbuch des Kautilya* (Wiesbaden, 1960).
- ²Eg. E.I. 12, p. 40, line 35; E.I. 15, p. 283, line 29.
- ³F. Wilhelm, *op. cit.*, p. 148; cp. V.P. Varma in the *Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society*, vol. 38, pp. 97ff.
- ⁴See B. Prasad, *The State in Ancient India* (Allahabad, 1928), p. 274.
- ⁵Ait. Br. 40.2 (p. 958).
- ⁶A.Ś. 1.9.9.
- ⁷On Yāj. 1.353.
- ⁸A.Ś. 1.9.10.
- ⁹Eg. Āp. 2.5.10.14; Gaut 11.12.
- ¹⁰Vi. 3.70; Yāj. 1.308.
- ¹¹Mn. 8.335; A.Ś. 9.3.14.
- ¹²Matsya. 215.10.
- ¹³*Mānasollāsa* 2.90–92.
- ¹⁴E.I., vol. 4, p. 307, line 67.
- ¹⁵A.Ś. 2.35.2.
- ¹⁶*ibid.* 2.36.2.
- ¹⁷*ibid.* 2.35.6.
- ¹⁸*ibid.* 2.36.4.
- ¹⁹I.A., vol. 8, p. 20.
- ²⁰E.I., vol. 1, p. 5, lines 3–4.
- ²¹Mbh. 12.85.12.
- ²²J.F. Fleet in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* for 1912, p. 707; P.V. Kane, *J.B.B.R.-A.S.*, vol. 34, pp. 648–653.
- ²³A.Ś. 2.1.4.
- ²⁴Mn. 7.115; Agni 223.1–4.
- ²⁵See R.K. Mookerji, *The Gupta Empire* (Bombay, 1947), pp. 156ff; B.C. Sen, *Some Historical Aspects of the Inscriptions of Bengal* (Calcutta, 1942), pp. 490ff.
- ²⁶E.I., vol. 15, p. 113 (plate 2).
- ²⁷E.I., vol. 7, p. 188, line 70.
- ²⁸See W. Rau, *Staat und Gesellschaft in alten Indien* (Wiesbaden, 1957), p. 57.
- ²⁹E.I., vol. 2, p. 83, line 22; I.A., vol. 15, p. 306, line 33.
- ³⁰C.I.I., vol. 3, p. 116, line 20; p. 216, lines 8–9.
- ³¹A.Ś. 2.34.12.
- ³²Yāj. 2.275.
- ³³A.Ś. 4.6–8.
- ³⁴*ibid.* 2.34.2.
- ³⁵Mn. 7.114.
- ³⁶A.Ś. 4.13.10.
- ³⁷*ibid.* 5.3.4. 'Because they have this much emolument, there is no opening for leverage (by others) or for anger.' See J.J. Meyer, *Das Altindische Buch vom Welt und Staatsleben* (Leipzig, 1926), p. 381, n. 3.
- ³⁸A.Ś. 1.17.1.
- ³⁹Eg. Matsya 219.
- ⁴⁰Mn. 7.217–220.
- ⁴¹*ibid.* 7.147–150; A.Ś. 1.15.2–12.
- ⁴²A.Ś. 1.11–12.

- ⁴³ibid. 1.13.14; 4.4.
⁴⁴ibid. 1.13.
⁴⁵See A.Ś. 1.16; Kām. 13.33.
⁴⁶A.Ś. 12.2-5.
⁴⁷ibid. 11.1.
⁴⁸ibid. 2.9.10-17.
⁴⁹ibid. 2.35.8-12.
⁵⁰Mbh. 7.53.4.
⁵¹Eg. Kām. 13.29; Mbh. 5.34.32.
⁵²A.Ś. 4.4-6.
⁵³Kām. 13.26.
⁵⁴A.Ś. 1.10.
⁵⁵ibid. 4.8.26.
⁵⁶ibid. 2.14.
⁵⁷Mn. 9.256-260.
⁵⁸Eg. A.Ś. 2.8, 9; 4.9; 5.1.
⁵⁹ibid. 2.7.
⁶⁰ibid. 2.8.
⁶¹ibid. 4.9.1-2.
⁶²ibid. 2.9.33.
⁶³ibid. 2.4.30.
⁶⁴ibid. 4.4.6-7.
⁶⁵ibid. 4.9.13-16.
⁶⁶Vi. 5.180.
⁶⁷Daśakumāracarita 8 (pt. 2, p. 52, lines 23f.).
⁶⁸A.Ś. 2.9.1-3.
⁶⁹Yāj. 1.332, 335.
⁷⁰Mn. 7.122-124.
⁷¹Yāj. 1.323-325.
⁷²Medh. on Mn. 9.294.

CHAPTER VI

THE MAURYAN EMPIRE

There is a generally accepted idea that the Mauryan empire (about 320 B.C.—185 B.C. was large and highly organized. We picture a network of imperial officials stretching over most of the length and breadth of India, decisions being transmitted from Pāṭaliputra to the regions of modern Mysore or the Punjab, armies of workmen carrying out imperial public works following plans drawn up in the offices of provincial governors. The purpose here is to call this idea in question.

Thin Evidence

The reason for this is not that it is demonstrably wrong but that it is generally accepted on evidence that is too thin. It is supported by inferences from a number of testimonies, each of which is inadequate but which seemingly confirm each other and make it appear, as if by mirrors, to be more abundantly attested than it is.

In the first place, there can be no natural presumption, in the absence of other evidence, that the territories of Chandragupta and Aśoka were so well integrated, their administrations so sophisticated, and their control so firm, as we are normally invited to believe. This view of North Indian kingdoms is quite different from the view we have of administrations that came before and after the Mauryan empire, and we certainly need positive reasons for accepting that it had such distinctive characteristics.

During the preceding periods known to us from sources such as the *Brāhmaṇas* and the Pali canon—periods which receive no detailed attention in this book—territorial kingdoms were developing. Kings were asserting their unique authority above the run of *kṣhatriya* claims to dignity, building fortifications, seeking to enlarge their territories, contracting dynastic marriages, and possibly granting land or revenues as rewards to favoured supporters. But there is no reason to suppose that they presided over elaborate bureaucracies or that villagers experienced the constant scrutiny of a central government.

So far as we can see, kings were still war leaders, or ceremonial dignitaries, or patriarchs to be approached in audience for grace and justice, but not primarily administrators. This is not to belittle their power. They may have had enormous arbitrary power, some of them. They may

have had large armies, and been able to command servility, or decree beheadings, or distribute wealth, wherever they went. But this arbitrary power needs to be distinguished from a continuing ability to make decisions which might affect subjects in any part of the kingdom. The distinction is important, because arbitrary power and regulating power are two quite different things; the second requires armies of officials who can be expected to carry out orders transmitted to them, armies of officials such as are attributed to the Mauryas, and there is no particular evidence of their existence in the India of earlier times.

After the Mauryas the political map of India was confused. There were no large empires, on quite the same scale, for a long time (assuming the Mauryan empire to have been as large as it is usually supposed to be). There were waves of invasions from the north-west, and numerous new kingdoms were set up and faded away or were swamped by their successors. The type of empire that we can discern, best represented by the Guptas of later centuries, is also very different from the integrated Mauryan colossus of the history books. These later empires were looser, they were spheres of influence or confederacies, they included numerous autonomous units that merely gave allegiance in a general way to their titular overlords.

Thus the strangely modern-seeming government attributed to at least the first three Mauryas sticks out like a sore thumb. It is like '1984' on the bookshelf between 'King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table' and 'Prester John.'

Dubious Evidences for Conventional View

There are five types of evidence that can be put forward for the conventional view of Mauryan empire and they are all dubious. They are :

The description of an organized state furnished by Megasthenes, the Greek ambassador at the court of Chandragupta;

The portrayal of an organized state in the *Arthaśāstra*, which for the purpose must be treated as of Mauryan date;

The positions of Aśoka's inscriptions, which seem to show a large empire;

The contents of Aśoka's inscriptions, which seem to show an organized empire;

The fact that we do not have much evidence of other kings at the time of the Mauryas, which suggests that other rulers were submerged.

No Evidence of Mauryas Submerging Other Kings

Perhaps it is best to take the last first. Though it is a point that should

not be neglected, we must remember at the same time how little is known about the kingdoms of the fourth century B.C. We would not necessarily expect to know the names of kings of all the Mauryas' vassal kingdoms if the empire were of the confederate type. After all the inscriptions of Aśoka are the first historical record. For the rest, what we know or think we know has to come from legends written down long after the event.

Consider the Nandas, the dynasty said to have been ruling at the Magadhan capital, Pāṭaliputra, before Chandragupta Maurya gained power and established a new dynasty. They might have been *sūdras*. They might have started their career as a robber band, or they might have been barbers. They might all have been brothers, but this does not seem very probable. There might have been nine of them, or the number nine might have had a purely magical significance. Our pre-inscriptional political and dynastic history is based on such stories, and stories can be forgotten, or enlarged to give a king greater glory than he possessed; and evidence of a rival dynasty's power can be suppressed or destroyed or superseded by a new myth. The onus of proof still rests with anybody who would assert that the Mauryas submerged the kings of the greater part of India.

Prescription, Not a Description

The weight of the argument from the *Arthaśāstra* can be judged largely on the foregoing discussions of this text; only a general characterization need be given here.

The argument from the *Arthaśāstra* rests on two propositions: that the text was written at about the time of Chandragupta Maurya, and that internal evidence shows its author to have been familiar with a large and organized empire such as Chandragupta is supposed to have had.

That Chandragupta's minister Kauṭilya or Kauṭalya was actually the author, however, is only one of the possibilities. Another is that his teachings merely formed the basis for a later compilation. In this case there is no telling how much the picture of an empire in it may have been modified during the intervening centuries. And a third possibility is that the work belongs to a later time, along with most of the *smṛti* and *śāstra* literature, and owes nothing to Kauṭilya beyond the eventual adoption of his name, a procedure that would not be without parallel in Sanskrit literature. It is not necessary to opt firmly for one of these possibilities. The doubt is enough to deprive the *Arthaśāstra* of its character as proof of things in Chandragupta's time.

But it is possible to accept entirely the total authenticity of the text for the purposes of this chapter, because the second proposition about

it is invalid too. It does not show that its author knew of any large and organized empire.

One of the features of the *Arthaśāstra* is that it presupposes wars of conquest to be a fit purpose for an ambitious king and devotes a great deal of space to advice on how to defeat all the other kings in the area. Military strategy seems to the author to be a part of political science—no distinction is made. Conquest is made into a philosophy, cynical diplomacy into a science. This might suggest that a Mauryan pursuit of all-India dominion was the background to the text's composition.

But, as the discussion of the *maṇḍala* theory and the idea of *dharmavijaya* above should show, this is not necessarily so. The *Arthaśāstra*'s model king does not annex defeated kingdoms, submerge their rulers, absorb them into his own state apparatus. On the contrary, the ideal of conquest according to *dharma* (as opposed to *asuravijaya* and *lobhavijaya*) obliges him to deal leniently with his conquered foe, perhaps re-installing him or placing a relative on the throne. The throne does not disappear. Tribute will certainly be asked for, but the vassal kingdom so far as we can see keeps most of its autonomy.

And the *maṇḍala* theory also is not a prescription for regulating the whole of India beneath one's own sceptre. It is a conceptualization of an arena full of petty kingdoms. All the kings in it are threats to each other because their claims are not limited by state constitutions to particular defined areas of territory, so they are constantly jostling with each other, forming and re-forming alliances and enmities. The successful king is not the one who wipes out all the others in the *maṇḍala*. He is the one who gets them to acknowledge him as overlord and give him tribute.

The ideal of empire is a leitmotiv of the *Arthaśāstra* as of other texts touching on politics, but it is a nebulous ideal, not given body by a re-drawing of frontiers or the extension of bureaucratic tentacles. The author of the *Arthaśāstra*, like the authors of later texts, could well describe this ideal but that would not prove that he knew of or worked in a regulated pan-Indian political unit.

Another characteristic of the text is that it describes the administrative machinery of the kingdom in great detail. The duties of numerous government officials are set out, with attention not only to office organization but also to professional technique. These are not professional men in independent local or occupational communities whose co-operation is to be sought by the king; they are full-time royal servants, with salaries, set out in the *Arthaśāstra*, that the king is responsible for paying. What is being described is clearly in some sense a bureaucracy, and it fits in with the conventional idea of Mauryan organization. Here,

we suppose, are the blueprints, drawn up by a responsible minister, from which Chandragupta, Bindusāra and Aśoka actually worked.

But there are two distinct reasons why we cannot accept the text as evidence of the type of empire attributed to the Mauryas. The first is that it is not a description of an empire.

It is only necessary to recall the nature of the *maṇḍala* theory, already considered, to see why this is so. The text is in the form of advice to a king, who is told how his kingdom should be run. His government or rule (*rājya*) is one of a number that are in competition with him and make up the *maṇḍala*, the orbit of the kings and kingdoms around him. Imperial ambition is to be gratified by securing himself against them, by defeating them as often as possible in war, by getting tribute from them, and by being acknowledged as lord by the people in the area of the *maṇḍala*. Another king in the *maṇḍala* might be his friend or his enemy, his overlord or his vassal, but must by definition as king have his own *rājya* and run his own bureaucracy.

The *Arthaśāstra* could arguably have been a model for the administration of the home territory around Pāṭaliputra. But there is no reason to suppose that the whole Mauryan empire was an integrated administrative unit run on the same model. It is more natural to suppose, until we find evidence to the contrary, that the Mauryan empire was a *maṇḍala* in which one king, the lord of Magadha, happened to have been extraordinarily successful in getting his own claims acknowledged. This view of it makes much more understandable the rapid break-up of the empire. What had to break up was not an administrative machine: it was an attitude towards Magadha on the part of its vassals, an attitude born perhaps of the size of the Magadhan army, which could change considerably with the fortunes of the season.

The second reason why we cannot accept the text as evidence of an empire of the type attributed to the Mauryas is that it is not a description. It is a prescription, and whether it ever found effect in reality is conjectural. What it shows is that the model it elaborates seemed to its author to represent the functions of government in accordance with the duties of a king. Thus it may throw light on the ancient ideas about the nature of kingship. It does not prove that Chandragupta's empire was highly organized.

There are two ways of interpreting the ideas about kingship shown by the high degree of organization in the *Arthaśāstra*'s ideal; one of them fits in with the ideology of a king's moral duty (*rājadharma*) bodied forth in Sanskrit sources; the other doesn't. The first interpretation is that the organization represents the fulfilment of an ideal

of paternal responsibility. The second is that it represents the fulfilment of an ideal of administrative efficiency. Each of these requires a large number of royal servants concerning themselves with all aspects of the lives of the subjects.

Paternal Ideology of Kingship

Various facts about the ideology of kingship suggest that the ideal was the paternal one. There is no distinction between administration and moral guidance : a king is to see that his subjects are pious as well as law-abiding. Aśoka said : 'All subjects are my children.'¹ Again, he said : 'They should be made to learn that Devānāmpiya is to them like a father.'^{1a} Religious observances and the support of priests and ascetics are everywhere assumed unquestioningly to be part of the proper task of a king. Pervading some of the myths is the idea of *karma*—the kingdom will prosper, not purely through the administrative efficiency of the king, but largely through his virtue, his observance of rituals and so forth, which will communicate benefits to the subjects in a supernatural way.

Lack of Modern Ideal of Administration

As we have already seen, the modern ideal of administration was lacking. The ubiquity of spies suggests not efficiency but a constant struggle to make administration work against a multitude of private, communal and factional interests.

It is easy to see that the ideal of paternal responsibility may often be realized in a single family, a single household; but when it is the political ideal of a whole kingdom, full of caste, occupational and local jealousies, there can be no natural presumption that the machinery that exists to make it effective will normally work. This is the point at which any argument from theoretical prescription to actual performance founders : there might indeed be armies of officials with administrative tasks assigned to them, but unless we know from primary sources that decisions taken at the centre were transmitted to them and orders carried out, we cannot say that the kingdom or empire was highly organized. The 'officials' might be local barons extracting taxes, bestowing patronage and gathering clients in the king's name. The use of the king's name does not constitute a high degree of organization. What we need is evidence that the legally prescribed quantities of taxation passed into Chandragupta's or Aśoka's treasury, and that a large number of orders issued by Chandragupta or Aśoka was actually put into effect throughout the villages of India. This evidence has not so far been presented.

So far there has been no discussion here of the evidence on the ground

(unless the *Arthaśāstra* be considered Mauryan), and there has been no documentation because the material has been considered in previous chapters. But it is necessary to look at the evidence of the Greek ambassador Megasthenes and the inscriptions of Aśoka, which might be considered to demonstrate the existence of the sort of empire commonly thought to have existed.

Extant Version of Megasthenes' Account Lacking

There is no extant version of the original account by Megasthenes of Chandragupta's India. What is available consists of extracts and references in the writings of Greek authors during several centuries following the life of Megasthenes. These writings include a great deal of fanciful description, peopling India with fairy-tale monsters, like the demons and ogres which in mediaeval Europe could be imagined to exist in other parts of the world. Thus the collections of fragments of Megasthenes from Greek literature made by J.W. McCrindle, whose translations are commonly used by scholars, may be valuable, but their *bona fides* as sober historical evidence is not very strong.

It is not however the purpose here to belittle Megasthenes. One fairly recent study of Megasthenes,^{1b} though not concerned specifically with Mauryan political institutions, suggests that existing versions of his account of India may be very reliable. Perhaps it would not be wise to dismiss him because our evidence is indirect and because his assertions are often uncorroborated. He was after all an eye-witness describing what he saw of Indian life, and this gives his story a value that any number of inscriptional ordinances and *śāstra* theorizings cannot parallel.

But, when all this is said, the fact remains that such a source as this must be suspect and cannot legitimately be advanced as proof of things that are not indicated by anything else.

One rather surprising assertion of Megasthenes is that there were seven classes or estates of society—not the four we know. The councillors and assessors of the king are described as constituting one class.² The king's overseers are another.³ These overseers appear to be spies. They get their information from prostitutes; some of them are assigned to the city; some of them to the army. On the subject of city administration it is also said that there were six committees each of five people, concerned with crafts, entertainment of visitors and foreigners, births and deaths, weights and measures, and manufactures.

It is true that no other source (not the *Arthaśāstra*) gives just this picture of municipal administration, and that there is some confusion about the *varṇas*, but at least there is some information here about the structure of the administration.

However ill-organized or ill-integrated the Mauryan empire may have been, there is no suggestion here that it was not powerful and did not have a big army, and there is evidence of Chandragupta's military might.⁴

No Evidence of Integrated Empire

Less reliable are Megasthenes' judgments where his Greek background influences his perception. For example he might describe small tribal communities as republics because they were small and independent like the Greek republics, not because they were necessarily republican in any useful sense (as R. Fick has suggested in his *Die Sociale Gliederung in Nordöstlichen Indien zu Buddhas Zeit*⁵), or he might say that India had no slavery because in fact Indian slavery was different from Greek slavery.⁶

His references to state monopoly might seem to suggest a high degree of organization. He asserts that nobody was allowed to own a horse or an elephant—these animals all belonged to the king.⁷ But this claim is rather improbable. It may reflect the practice, certainly well known in respect of many things (notably salt) at other times, of raising revenue by licensing things. Kāmandaki in his *śāstra* lists elephants as a source of revenue. And we may well imagine that the practice, thus attested in later times, was explained to Megasthenes in this way. But what we want to know is, not whether officials were in a position to levy licence fees on elephants in the name of the king, but whether the monopoly was highly organized or effectively centralized, and Megasthenes is silent on this point.

These are not of course the only allusions by Megasthenes that could be considered. We could examine his mention of various sorts of officials (such as those he called the *agronomoi*). But in every case what we see is a description of a government structure as it was explained to him, not evidence of an efficient and effective administration. We still do not know in any detail how officials behaved, how far orders from the palace were obeyed, how far the flow and distribution of revenue were actually determined by the decisions taken in the palace, how large was the area administered directly by officials paid from the treasury at Pāṭaliputra.

Even if Megasthenes were a reliable authority in general, and even if his observations about government were reliable in particular, we would still not have evidence that Chandragupta controlled a large and highly organized empire. We know that Magadha had a formal government structure that may have been very elaborate, but we do not know

whether any other provincial government structures were integrated with it or whether it was in reality a machine with levers worked by the king.

No Indication of Organized Empire

There remain the inscriptions of Aśoka, the third emperor of the Mauryan dynasty. The discovery of these inscriptions all over India, in comparatively recent times, is above all what has given rise to the legend of Aśoka's glory.

It will not be argued here that the inscriptions are all forgeries, or that they were all erected by somebody else of the same name. It will not be denied that the empire covered most of India. The question is rather what sort of empire it was that could be so large.

We can accept, firstly, that the empire was large. Rock edicts bearing the inscriptions of Aśoka appear at places as far apart as Siddapura, Dhauli, Sahasram, Shahbazgarhi and Girnar. They are distributed over nearly all of India except the Tamil extreme south. Yet Aśoka is not known to have extended his dominions by constant wars. Only one conquest is recorded, that of Kalinga in the area of modern Orissa. We may suppose that the empire was built up partly perhaps by other means than conquest, and partly by the activities of those from whom Aśoka inherited it, his father Bindusāra and his grandfather Chandragupta. The inscriptions that he left, though only one mentions him by name, have plenty of information about his policies. The series of rock edicts are virtually duplications of each other, with insignificant variations and adjustments of the language, Prākṛit, to local usage.⁸

We can accept, secondly, that Aśoka was powerful. After the conquest of Kalinga he explicitly renounced the use of force—for reasons of piety according to the inscriptions, not because there were no resources to support an army. Even if we were inclined to believe that the claims of piety are all hypocrisy, we would have to acknowledge that Chandragupta built a considerable empire and gained tribute from many sources, and that there is no evidence of their diminution through the reign of Bindusāra. Aśoka was according to his account able to mount a successful campaign against Kalinga.

Thirdly, we have to accept that there was a sufficient degree of organization in the empire to allow pillars to be set up and rock inscriptions to be engraved in the further parts of India according to a single formula. The craftsmen responsible for the job itself may or may not have been employees of a government in Pāṭaliputra. They could for all we know have been employees of local monarchs who had agreed to publish their overlord's proclamations. But either way the transmission of orders is certainly significant.

But to say all this is not to say that the empire was highly organized, with an elaborate bureaucracy at the emperor's command. Whether this was so still remains an open question, and in the end the case for Mauryan administrative efficiency rests on the content of the inscriptions, and the policies which they declare.

Role of Pope

The chief topics of Aśoka's edicts are rewards and punishments, honours, remission of penalties, endorsement of official actions, communications, answers, and passes of safe conduct. But the dominant characteristic of the inscriptions is that they are pervaded by moral preoccupations. Aśoka's chief concern is that the subjects should be pious. The orders do not read like regulations set out in terms that will clarify the nature of their jobs to civil servants. They read like exhortations to good behaviour from a kindly father. 'All subjects are my children,' says Aśoka. Subjects are to honour men of religion, revere their parents, respect their *dharma*. Thus there is no distinction between the spheres of morals and politics.⁹

Aśoka paid special respect to the Buddhists, and Buddhist legends represent him as a devout and committed Buddhist, but he honoured all sects. There was no established church. Various other sects are specified as fit objects of reverence and support by Aśoka.¹⁰ A later story has it that Aśoka's ministers finally deposed him, distressed that he was frittering away the resources of the kingdom in the support of religion.¹¹ It is true that this story is, as J.W. Spellman characterizes it, a 'dubious legend,'^{11a} but it may be significant. There is a number of confused legends surrounding the last years of Aśoka, and it is difficult to know what kernel of truth there may be in them. A.L. Basham has subjected them to some scrutiny, proceeding by assessing the common elements and eliminating what can be accounted for on grounds other than that it is true, and concludes that there is indeed a kernel of truth. In particular, it may be that Aśoka had trouble with women in his last years.¹²

Some inscriptions appear to have the force of legal ordinances. In one pillar edict it is said that condemned prisoners should be given three days' respite.¹³ In another place it is claimed that twenty-five times in twenty-six years amnesties to prisoners had been issued.¹⁴ Again, it is desired that in certain cases animals should not be slain.¹⁵ Though such declarations have often been seen as decrees, they are somewhat optative in character. Actual decrees are very few.

There are references to royal servants. Officials called *Lājukas* are mentioned. 'Thinking: "The intelligent nurse will be able to keep my

children well," the Lājukas were appointed by me for the welfare and happiness of the country people.¹⁶ They go on tour to represent Aśoka's care for the subjects.¹⁷ We learn that Aśoka's son at Ujjain was to send officers on tours of not more than three years, while others were to be sent from Takṣaśīla.¹⁸ What may have been Aśoka's most important institution, at least in his eyes, was the appointment of a new class of officials or representatives, called *Dhamma-mahāmattas*, who were to go on tour proclaiming Aśoka's desire for justice, piety and dutiful behaviour to abound.¹⁹ They do not look especially like civil servants. They look more like peripatetic preachers.

Other officers are mentioned. A class of *vracabhūmikas* mentioned²⁰ is translated by J. Bloch as 'préposés aux fermes' on the assumption of a correspondence with the Sanskrit *vraja* (an interpretation preferred to an alternative 'préposés aux latrines,' Sanskrit *varcas*), and these people might look like pastoral bureaucrats, rural cadres, but the truth is that we do not know what the word means. It has been argued that the duties involved concern temple precincts.²¹

An interesting passage touches on the transmission of orders.²² Aśoka appears to say that if there should be any argument in the council of ministers (*parisā*) about any instructions that he gives to his overseers (*mahāmātras*), he is to be informed at once wherever he is. It is not clear what we should understand by *parisā*—whether a council at Pāṭaliputra or a council at the capital of the local feudatory—or what frictions and antipathies may lie in the background. Who is trying to enlist whom on whose side?

Another obscure passage says that the council shall appoint or give orders to the *yuktas* (either a particular class, or officials in general) *gaṇanāyam hetuto ca vyamjanato ca*.²³ J. Bloch renders this 'pour l' object et pour le détail.' M. de Z. Wickremasinghe renders it 'regard being had to their raison d'être and to the letter (of the law).'²⁴

These passages illustrate the obscurity that still clouds Aśoka's administrative arrangements. We do not know much except in general terms what were the duties of his officials. The references to processes of government allow the interpretation that he was trying to work an integrated imperial organizational machine—they allow various interpretations—but for all we know, instead of a single Council at Pāṭaliputra there were governments in a number of feudatory states, and Aśoka's *Mahāmattas*, *Lājukas* and *Dhamma-mahāmattas* were envoys to preach justice and tell the vassals what their *dharma* was. If so, we can imagine that this was resented when it went beyond the vague and pious platitudes about justice that everybody would find acceptable.

There is a passage where it is said that 'evenness' (*samatā*) in trials and punishments is to be desired.²⁵ It has been suggested that the 'evenness' is impartiality towards the four *varṇas*, lack of social discrimination.²⁶ It is also a possibility that it means uniformity in the proceedings of different courts in different parts of the empire—courts that might be operated by other monarchs. It may be worth noting that the uniformity or impartiality is not something being enforced; it is something 'to be desired'—the prescription reads like a request rather than a regulation.

Random allusions in the inscriptions are all that touch on the nature of the empire as a political unit. One inscription lists neighbouring territories.²⁷ The word used to designate them is *sāmanta*, except in the Girnar version where it is *saṁīpa*. The translation of J. Bloch is 'voisin.'

It has been claimed that the word *sāmanta* as it appears in Aśokan inscriptions and in the *Arthaśāstra* evidently meant 'independent neighbour.'²⁸ In the inscriptions it apparently means 'neighbour.' As for the *Arthaśāstra*,²⁹ at one point treatment of dangerous *sāmantas* is dealt with in the same context as treatment of princes under the heading '(preservation of) sole sovereignty' (*ekaiśvaryam*), suggesting that *sāmantas* were in a sense, if only the sense of being in the *maṇḍala*, within the king's dominions.³⁰ A recent valuable study traces the evolution of the meaning of *sāmanta* from 'neighbouring king' to 'feudatory.'³¹ That this development should be possible is attributed to the nature of *dharmavijaya*, conquest by righteousness or in accordance with *dharma*, which required homage but not necessarily annexation. A neighbouring king became a *sāmanta*, in the later sense, if fear of the suzerain compelled his obedience.

A later inscription suggests that Aśoka's empire contained kings,³² with a reference to a *Yavana* (Greek) governor with the title of *rāja*, and his own edicts describe his conquest by righteousness as having been carried to various kings.³³ Indeed, acceptance of righteousness appears to define his empire. Where he appeals to the western people to accept his paternal authority as a source of happiness³⁴ it is likely that he is referring to the real basis of the type of power that he had—acknowledgement in general terms as moral guardian.

It is not so easy to see, given the role and meaning of *dharmavijaya*, how the inside and outside of empire could be given any clear-cut definition or even whether the definition is entirely geographical. In one place occur the variants *savata vijitasi* (Kalsi, followed with variations of dialect by Shahbazgarhi and Mansehra) and *savapu(tha) viyam* (Dhauri), describing the area in which the *Dhamma-mahāmattas* were to function.³⁵ That is, different versions of the same inscription represented it as the

whole empire, and the whole earth. It is easy to understand how these variants can arise only if we abandon the idea that the domain of Aśoka's administration was defined by territorial boundaries.

The thirteenth rock edict is generally considered to contain a description of the empire, but this may be misleading since it is likely that not all the people listed were actually dependent on Aśoka politically. What is said is that *dhamma* had been carried to all the people listed and that, even in places where Aśoka's envoys (*dūtas*) had not gone, *dhamma* was obeyed.

What all this suggests is that for Aśoka his empire consisted, not of a territory, but of the respect that men anywhere in the world gave him as moral guardian, as spokesman for *dhamma*.

It is possible that his *Lājukas* and others were armies of officials carrying out decisions taken by him. We cannot know this for certain, because—as with Kauṭilya's administrative structure—our evidence is of the existence of the offices, not of how their occupants behaved. It is also possible that these representatives of Aśoka were envoys to his feudatories, envoys who tried to foster Aśoka's prestige by distributing largesse to vassals and to religious orders and preaching *dhamma*.

This second possibility is part of an interpretation that is alternative to the usual view of the empire. After the Kalinga war, Aśoka renounced the use of military force. He took to religion, and as time went on became increasingly wrapped up in *dhamma*. Precisely because he had abandoned the role of ambitious king, and adopted the role of pope, the other kings in the *maṇḍala* were prepared to let him have his dignity proclaimed far and wide, like the pope's in Europe, by nuncios whose function was to tell people (lords and subjects) how they should run their affairs, and whose parish like Wesley's was the whole world. They could be tolerated, so long as they stuck to general exhortations to rectitude which would support the vassals' authority rather than undermine it, and which would seem to be good for the establishment; in particular the pill was sugared with the munificence to religious foundations whose vehicles they were, a munificence that was the despair of Magadha. So far did Aśoka carry his obsessions with *dhamma* and papacy that by the end of his reign he was considered a danger to the kingdom.

Conventional View Highly Speculative

Now this is entirely speculative, and it is not suggested here that this is actually how it was. The argument here is that the conventional view of the Mauryan empire is entirely speculative too.

NOTES

- ¹Dhauḷi and Jaugada Sep. Edict 1 (p. 21, line 26—p. 23 line 1); 2 (p. 27, lines 12ff).
- ²P.E. 4 (p. 44).
- ³A. Dahlquist *Megasthenes and Indian Religion* (Uppsala, 1962).
- ⁴J.W. McCrindle, *Ancient India as described by Megasthenes and Arrian* (Bombay, 1877), fragment 34, pp. 85–86.
- ⁵ibid., pp. 86–87.
- ⁶idem. *The Invasion of India by Alexander the Great* (Westminster, 1896) pp. 281–2.
- ⁷See B. Prasad, *The State in Ancient India* (Allahabad, 1928), pp. 168–9. and R. Fick, *Die Sociale Gliederung in Nordöstlichen Indien zu Buddhas Zeit* (Kiel, 1897), p. 90.
- ⁸See A.N. Bose in the *Journal of Indian History*, vol. 19, pp. 145ff.
- ⁹J.W. McCrindle, *Ancient India as described by Megasthenes and Arrian* (Bombay, 1877) fragment 39, p. 90.
- ¹⁰Woolner's *Aśoka Text and Glossary* (Calcutta, 1924) is the standard edition.
- ¹¹Moral preoccupations dominate R.E. 3, 4, 7, 9, 11–13 and all Pillar Edicts.
- ¹²R.E. 12.
- ¹³See Cowell and Neil (eds.), *Divyāvadāna* (Cambridge, 1886), p. 384.
- ¹⁴J.W. Spellman, *Political Theory of Ancient India* (Oxford, 1964), p. 92.
- ¹⁵A.L. Basham, "The Literary Sources of Ancient Indian History" in *Studies in Indian History and Culture* (Calcutta, 1964), pp. 30–40.
- ¹⁶P.E. 4 (pp. 44–45, line 18).
- ¹⁷P.E. 5 (pp. 48–49, lines 5–7).
- ¹⁸P.E. 5.
- ¹⁹P.E. 4 (pp. 42ff).
- ²⁰P.E. 3 (pp. 40f).
- ²¹Kalinga Separate Edict 1 (p. 24, lines 23ff).
- ²²R.E. 5.
- ²³R.E. 12, R.E. 6.
- ²⁴See the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 6, pp. 547f.
- ²⁵R.E. 6 (p. 12); Ya ca kimci mukhato āñāpayāmi svayam dāpakam vā srāvāpakam vā ya vā puna mahāmātresu ācāyika aropitam bhavati tāya athāya vivādo nijhati va samto parisāyam anantaram pativedetavyam me sarvatra sarve kāle.
- ²⁶R.E. 3
- ²⁷M. de Z. Wickremasinghe, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 6, p. 545.
- ²⁸P.E. 4. Ichitaviye hi esā kimti viyohāla-samatā ca siya daṁḍa-samatā ca.
- ²⁹R. Thapar, *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (Oxford, 1961), p. 104.
- ³⁰R.E. 2 (pp. 2–3, line 24).
- ³¹R.S. Sharma, *op. cit.*, p. 212, followed by R. Choudhary in the *Journal of Indian History*, vol. 38, p. 196.
- ³²A.Ś. 6.1.3. This is the passage evidently intended, though the reference given by both authorities appears as 1.6.
- ³³A.Ś. 5.6.10; cp. 7.18.29; 7.5.38.49
- ³⁴See Lallanji Gopal in the *J.R.A.S.* for 1963, pp. 21–37.
- ³⁵E.I. p. 43 (Jūnāgadh Inscription) line 8. Aśokasya Mauryasya . . . te (kr̥te?) yavanarājena Tuṣ (ā) spheṇādhiṣṭhāya.
- ³⁶R.E. 13 (pp. 28–29, lines 12ff).
- ³⁷R.E. 5.
- ³⁸R.E. 5 (pp. 10–11, lines 10–12).

CHAPTER VII

DIVINITY AND CONTRACT

It is impossible to investigate the nature of ancient Indian kingship without forming some views or making some assumptions about the role of supernatural elements in the institution. The *sūtras*, *smṛtis* and *śāstras* are permeated with religious ideas and do not distinguish between politics or law and morals or metaphysics. Even inscriptions of kings show religious preoccupations and sometimes declare particular kings to be in some sense sons of gods.

Different inferences can be drawn from these. An unthinking extreme is the interpretation that kings were omnipotent oriental despots, who with the assistance of priests deluded their subjects into the belief that kings were gods and thus extracted from them servile obedience.

Basis of King's Legitimacy

But we do not have to go this far. We might decide, as some historians have done in the past, that all the suggestions of royal divinity in the sources can be explained away, and that in reality kings were elected leaders in a healthy democratic system. There are also infinite intermediate interpretations. One is that the institution of kingship was based on a social contract, but that this was given a divine sanction and that kings were treated as gods, or that kings were regarded as gods only so long as they obeyed their *dharma*, or that they were divine in a full sense but acted like constitutional monarchs. An understanding of the basis of the king's legitimacy is important to the study of his office, but answers to the questions that arise about it are not immediately available.

A valuable study of such questions has been made by J.W. Spellman, who considers, in one chapter, the ideas that monarchy was based on a social contract (among other theories of its origin)¹ and, in another, the nature of the divinity attaching to the monarchy.² He concludes that divine appointment is the prevailing idea of the origin of kingship, and despite some elements of social contract in the notion of an exchange of taxation for protection, royal power was not derived from an agreement with the people. As for divinity, kings were really considered divine, but divinity was cheap : kings shared it with various other things and people.

These conclusions will not in essence be disputed here, but there are further points that can be made. J.W. Spellman's book is, as the title of it indicates, an essay in political philosophy rather than history; and the discussion of royal legitimacy among scholars has often been concerned with the way in which people actually regarded their kings and the way in which kings behaved.

The enquiry is likely to be confused if certain distinctions are not made, because the questions that we can ask about the origin of a king's authority are subject to at least three classifications. The important classification into theory and practice has already been touched upon. To say that a king was or was not divine in *śāstra* metaphysics is to say nothing directly about the monarchy as a social fact. Secondly, we can ask whether a king's authority makes for strength or weakness in the institution. Thirdly, we can ask whether the sanction for the monarchy is human or divine.

Authority Circumscribed by Tradition

To give an answer on one of these levels is not to give an answer on another. A king who is regarded as a god, or as having divine authority, may be either a figurehead with symbolic ritual functions or an awesome tyrant. A king whose authority is considered to be derived from human convention may be either a democratic chairman subject to many checks and balances or a Stalin. A leader who in theory is a priestly figure with only symbolic power may in fact use his influence to make himself the powerful head of a secular bureaucracy. All permutations are possible.

The suggestions to be made here are these. There was indeed a theory of royal divinity, but it was a myth that so far as we know nobody regarded as literally true. The practical significance of the myth is in what it shows about the way in which society functioned. And there was indeed a theory of contract in a sense, though it did not derive the king's authority from an agreement with the people. But it was not historical, and it was not even supposed to be historical. Its significance is in showing what people thought about their society. Neither theory implies anything about the king's power in practice, but the sort of society which the theories reflect is such that royal authority would normally be circumscribed by tradition.

Myth of Royal Divinity

There are many references to kings as gods, implicit in the titles they take, in the descent they claim, in the justifications given by lawbooks for their power, in the myths of the prehistoric origins of society. These

references have been much discussed. Most in fact can be seen as metaphors, such as the ascriptions of divinity to a king on the occasion of a sacrifice or consecration.³ They do not necessarily imply more than that the occasion makes possible a mystic communion with the gods who enter into the persons of the sacrificers—not necessarily kings alone. Numerous references attest the equivalence of the position of the king to that of a god, as where it is said that the coronation of the king is really the coronation of Indra.⁴ These concepts appear to have a ceremonial and symbolic significance, which may indeed be important for our understanding of the institution but does not actually mean that the monarch is divine.

Some passages make an explicit identification however. The king is not a man, he is a great god in human form.⁵ He is a god born on earth.⁶ Even an infant king is not to be despised because he is really a god.⁷ Such references as these, among many others which indicate different degrees of association of kingship with the supernatural, have been seen as evidence of a theory of royal divinity.

But it is surely true that divinity was a much less awesome thing for the authors and the public of our sources than it is for us.⁸ We inherit, whether we subscribe to Christian belief or not, a dualistic framework of ideas about the supernatural which makes us regard a god as a being in a world totally distinct from and superior to our own. We see a gulf fixed between two realms, the world we know and the heavens above. We consider a god on earth to be something unique, like Christ, and we see the divinity of such a being as a characteristic of his intrinsic nature and his origin.

In a framework of ideas such as ancient Hindus had, there was no such uniqueness. Its emphasis was entirely on the immanence, not the transcendence, of divinity. Its currency was inflated, and its value debased, by the multiplication of heavens and of supernatural states and conditions, some of them reckoned lower in rank than the condition of men. Metaphysics declared that we pass from life to life and move from grade to grade according to merit. We may be gods in the next life; we may have been gods in the previous life. But all—gods, angels, ghosts, men, demons, animals—live in the world of illusion, and salvation means escape from this world, means no more rebirth.

These are commonplaces of Indian thought. What they suggest is that divinity entered a king by virtue of his function in protecting society, which was like the gods' function in guarding the order of the universe, *dharma*. Function, rather than origin, defined divinity: if a god failed in his function he violated *dharma*, generated evil *karma* and lost his

nature. The statements 'Kings were held to have divine nature' and 'Kings were held to have divine functions' are both true, and mean much the same thing.

All this concerns no more than the sort of theory implicit or explicit in the sacred lore. It says nothing about the way monarchy worked. We might believe that people were made to think that their kings were gods in order to compel their obedience, but we need good evidence for this notion because it is highly implausible. It implies that ancient Indians were a great deal more gullible and foolish than people usually are. They could see that their kings had human passions and human parents, and could be treated for all practical purposes as ordinary mortals.⁹

People might have their own reasons for accepting royal divinity in a symbolic sense, but that is a different matter. It means that the idea of royal divinity is a myth.

Now a myth is a story that gets wide currency, is often repeated, and is socially important, although everybody knows that it is false. It is important because it represents something that we would like to be true. Consider how a future historian might examine the myths of our time. 'Did people really believe,' he might ask, 'that commercial products had miraculous power? It appears from the abundance and the nature of advertising claims that the capitalists were able to delude people into the belief that the things they bought actually had supernatural potency, that their detergents would get things clean by magic, that petrol in their cars would propel them at the speed of light.' But the real significance of the modern myths is in the appeal they make to our need for a sense that we are protected and cherished by the favour of experts who understand the workings of the universe—the scientists and technologists whose inventions, we wish to believe, are like magic. Similarly, we can imagine that the myth of divine kingship made an appeal to a different sort of need, the need for a sense that society was cherished and protected by the gods and by the experts, the priests, who understood the workings of the universe. Just as the commercial products are the vehicle of the magic made possible by scientists, the king was the vehicle of the magic that the priests understood.

This does not mean that kings were given unlimited powers. The nature of the myth suggests a different interpretation. The function of the gods was to watch over the settled order of the universe, to see that all creatures followed their *dharma*, their moral duty, and kept in their stations. Similarly the kings were to safeguard the order of society, seeing to it that the castes and other groups in it behaved themselves according to custom and did not leave their known spheres of activity. The kings'

brief did not go beyond ensuring that the stability of society was unimpaired by punishing those who sought to disturb it. If these were the reasons that people had for accepting the institution of kingship—and the institution could not have existed without being accepted, for a king's right to be king could not be enforced except by people who accepted that it should be enforced—then they left little room for activities such as would tend to change the nature of society, activities such as seem proper for a modern government. Paradoxically, the theory of royal divinity seems to set limits to a king's authority rather than to remove them.

Myth of Fish Conduct

There are certain myths that suggest a contract theory of the origin of kingship. The view offered in many sources postulates a state of chaos, *mātsyanyāya*, 'analogy of the fish' (which eat each other), where every man was for himself. This state was usually preceded by a fall from a previous state of harmony and felicity, and followed by agreement upon the necessity of a king to protect all men and avoid anarchy in return for tribute. The *Rāmāyaṇa* dwells on the horrors of the fish-conduct stage. Similar passages occur elsewhere.¹⁰

The picture of a golden age followed by a fall appears in Buddhist literature, notably the *Dīgha Nikāya*.¹¹ When society was swamped by anarchy and chaos the first leader, Mahājānasammata, was chosen by the people to protect them in return for a part of their produce. In one *Jātaka* the king is chosen by an assembly, while other species of creature choose each a leader.¹² A similar view is to be found in Jain literature.¹³ Here also the dark age is described, being characterized by all manner of paradoxes and perversions.

The myth of 'fish conduct' and the need for a leader have prompted in some people the view that democratic constitutional theory was known. It has been supposed that kings were regarded as servants of the people, and evidence for this has been sought in various sources.

Public-Servant Thesis

The idea of an exchange of taxation for protection is found in places such as the *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra*, which says at one point that the king protects his subjects, supported (*bhṛta*) by a contribution of one-sixth (of the grain).¹⁴ But there is no need to see this as an assertion of the king's servitude. *Bhṛta* means 'supported,' 'maintained,' and the statement is merely a description of what happens, without saying whether it happens at the initiative of the king, the subjects, both parties in contract, or some other party.

There is another passage which lends itself to similar interpretation. According to the *Arthaśāstra*, the king addressing his troops before a battle should say : 'I have the same means of subsistence, and this kingdom [to be conquered] is to be enjoyed by me together with you.'¹⁵ It would be possible to punctuate the sentence differently ('I earn the same wage as you; this kingdom is to be enjoyed'), but the rendering as here makes better sense. Following U.N. Ghoshal, 'this kingdom' can be taken to refer to the kingdom that is to be conquered.¹⁶ The whole then seems perfectly clear : king and soldiers alike depend on the tribute or plunder that can be wrested from victory, and both parties will benefit from the conquest. When this is admitted, there seems to be no good reason to accept the interpretation of some¹⁷ that this passage designates the king as a wage-earner or public servant, a claim on the king's part that would be irrelevant in the context. *Vetana* is literally 'means of subsistence' and is normally 'wage,' but it is clear that in this passage it refers to the source of wealth.

Similar arguments apply to the other passages that have been adduced in support of the 'public-servant' thesis.¹⁸ They merely specify that the subjects support the king and he in exchange protects them; this does not make him their servant—a master is not the servant of his slave, on whose work he depends and whom he protects. Aparārka says : 'When he who is not a *kṣhatriya* performs the work of a *kṣhatriya* he should do all this [i.e. give protection as king] since the rule is that by assuming the position or the work of a particular person or thing one receives what is due to that person or thing, and the duty of protecting the subjects arises from the fact of taking taxes from them.'¹⁹ Here it is the function of kingship (possibly a divine function, and sufficient to imbue the performer symbolically with divinity), rather than any terms of employment set out by the public, that figures as the obligation upon the *de facto* king to protect. A king who fails to maintain order is not failing to give service to a master; nor is he failing to carry out the terms of a contract that he signed as an equal : he is only failing to carry out his *dharma*, the duty of his station appointed for him by the gods.

The argument for royal servitude is really semantic : it cannot show that kings were servants except in the sense that they had to earn money, like everybody else, and somebody had to provide the money. Anybody might for that reason be called a servant in sarcasm, or as a euphemism, like *Āryadeva's* king who is chided for being arrogant when he is a servant of the mass, supported by the one-sixth tribute.²⁰ This is not a piece of *śāstra* political philosophy reflecting a scheme of ideas about kingship, nor does it suggest anything about the way in which kings actually behaved.

Servitude is one thing; contract between equal partners is another. The passages we have been considering state that an exchange takes place without specifying its terms. This might be seen as a social contract, but equally it might be seen as an arrangement instituted by the gods (as the 'fish-conduct' myths sometimes represent it) whereby the king is divinely appointed, performs a divine function, and is thus himself a god. The *quid pro quo* principle is entirely consistent with royal divinity.

The king's wealth is compared with vapour drawn up from the seas.²¹ This is afterwards returned in the form of rain. It is therefore possible to see this as a form of exchange, but it is not between equal partners. The king, being the sun, draws up the tribute of the vapour by the power of his own radiance, like Indra. Manu does not say that he is thereafter obliged by the terms of a contract to return the tribute in a rain of benefits. What Manu says is that, imitating the vigour of Indra, the sun, the wind, Yama, Varuṇa, the moon, Agni, and the earth, he should, like Indra in the rainy season, shower down benefits. That is, the obligation to do so is imposed not by the action of the people in yielding up tribute but by his god-like *dharma*. The very passage that most graphically represents the apparent function of a contract also enshrines the principle of the divine nature of the king's office.

A Piece of Social Anthropology

The fish-conduct myth, in which to avoid the evils of fallen man's nature the people accept a leader who is chosen by them, or for them by a god, is not a picture of historical reality. It is not supposed to be, and was not regarded as such by those who propagated it. It is a piece of social anthropology, and represents the way in which people thought about their own society.

Like a laboratory experiment that is made more perfect than nature to demonstrate a process, the myth abstracts certain principles from society and shows them in a pure form. The original golden age before the fall of man does not seem necessary to a myth that is apparently about the origin of kingship in anarchy, but it has its place as the demonstration of one principle, the principle of *dharma* which, if it were perfectly obeyed, would mean perfect harmony in society. There follows the opposite principle, the conduct of fish preying on each other, in which all men forsake their *dharma*. The king is represented as the man who makes men hold to the duties appointed for their communities and stations so that society comes to be arranged in a pattern of *varṇas* and *āśramas*. If the king fails in his own *dharma*, fish-conduct starts creeping in, and the communities fall apart. He is thus the representative of the pattern of social relationships.

What we have here is an equilibrium system, similar to those that are often depicted for us by the students of African tribes. We may choose to disbelieve that kings normally succeeded in maintaining equilibrium or really concerned themselves especially with seeing that people followed the occupations specified by *dharma*, but they certainly felt obliged to make pious protestations of such concern. We may, equally, choose to disbelieve that the equilibrium systems of the African tribes are really as stable and self-adjusting as they are made to seem from theoretical description. But the fish-conduct myth certainly represents a serious attempt by ancient Indians to understand the society in which they lived, to make it intelligible to themselves by reducing its confusion to an ordered pattern that might guide them in making judgments and decisions. In such a situation a ruler scarcely had *carte blanche* to interpret the duties of government according to his whim. He could be powerful, he could be arbitrary, he could be oppressive even, but if he did anything that seemed to threaten the presumed institutions of society (like failing to quell disorders, or trying to deprive any class in society of its customary rights), his authority would soon be forfeited.

NOTES

¹J.W. Spellman, *Political Theory of Ancient India*, (Oxford, 1964), pp. 1-25.

²*ibid.*, pp. 26-42.

³*ibid.*, p. 30.

⁵*ibid.*, 12.68.40.

⁴Mbh. 12.67.4.

⁶*ibid.*, 12.59.128ff.

⁷Mn. 8.8

⁸See A.L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India* (London, 1954), p. 86; J.W. Spellman, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-42.

⁹It is true that passages in the *Arthaśāstra* suggest the fostering of a belief in god-kingship. but it would perhaps be over-simple to see god-kingship as an instrument of political power, rather than as a symbol with social significance. On god-kingship in ancient Cambodia, a possibly useful comparison, see the present author's "Devaraja" in the *Journal of South-East Asian History*, Sept. 1969, (vol. X). pp. 202-223.

¹⁰Rm 2.67; Cp. Mn. 7.3, Mbh. 17.15.30; 12.67.16; Kām 2.40; Matsya 225.9.

¹¹Dig. Nik Ajjañña-suttanta.

¹²Jāt. vol. 2, p. 351 (Ulūka-Jātaka).

¹³Ādipurāṇa 3.5ff.

¹⁴Baudh. 1.10.1.

¹⁵A.Ś. 10.3.27. *Tulya-vetana 'smi bhavadbhiḥ saha bhogyam idaṁ rājyam.*

¹⁶U.N. Ghoshal, *A History of Indian Political Ideas* (Bombay, 1959), p. 117.

¹⁷E.g. V. Ramaswami in the *Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society*, vol. 34, p. 46.

¹⁸E.g. Mbh. 5.118.3; A.Ś. 1.13; Gaut. 10.28.

¹⁹Aparārka, on Yāj. 1.366.

²⁰*Catuhśataka*, 4, verse 77.

²¹Mn. 9.305.

CHAPTER VIII

DANḌA

There are various possible ways of accounting for the bonds that held an ancient Indian community together, and not all of them are equally satisfactory. There is, for example, the supposition that at some point in time men made a contract with a ruler, whereby they would obey him in return for protection. However, we have already seen that this is neither what actually happened nor what people believed to have happened.

There is the supposition that men were persuaded to believe that their kings were gods, and thus fooled by a class of manipulators into giving an obedience that was not necessarily earned. We have seen that this view is unsatisfactory, since there is no evidence that ancient Indians were especially gullible, or that a belief in the divinity of kingship necessarily entailed servile reverence towards actual kings.

There is the supposition that rulers were powerful men who were able to get obedience by sheer force. This has the air of being a modern and realistic interpretation, and it may be true as far as it goes, but it does not succeed, as it may seem to succeed, in eliminating other ideas.

Fear of force alone is not a sufficient explanation. The taxpayer may have feared the tax collector, but what hold did the king have over the tax collector? No doubt he in turn feared the king's executioner, and the executioner feared the king's army. But there is no reason why the army, a crowd of men armed to the teeth, should fear one man, the king. Force alone cannot offer a complete explanation of legitimacy.

A ruler could rule only so long as men believed that the particular groups to which they belonged were compatible with the institution of kingship. We have to suppose, for example, that soldiers had loyalty to the army as a group, of which a king was member and head. Or we have to suppose that the institution of kingship was identified in people's minds with the maintenance of the groups to which their loyalties were due. This second supposition is amply confirmed by the mythology of kingship, where it is said that a king's function is to maintain *dharma*. He does this by keeping people in their degrees—a task known as *danḍa*—and preventing the *brāhmaṇas* from murdering, the *kṣatriyas* from betraying, the *vaiśyas* from idling, and the *sūdras* from getting mastery

over everybody. If any people made a move to abolish the institution of kingship, they made enemies of all groups other than their own, because the throne, with or without real power attached to it, symbolized the co-existence, general harmony and preservation of the various groups in the community.

This interpretation of the legitimacy of Indian kingship is not the only possible one, but it is suggested by the investigation of ancient ideas about a king's function to which this chapter will be devoted. It is stated here because it shows how ancient ideas and ancient reality come together—we cannot account completely for the function of kingship in actual practice without appealing to the conventional ideas that people had about it, because material sanctions alone are not a sufficient explanation. The investigation to be undertaken here is an investigation of ideas only, but by its nature it is likely to throw some light on the way people behaved.

The ideas about the legitimacy of kingship and sanctions behind it, so far as the *smṛtis* and *śāstras* can represent them, have often been characterized as materialistic, secular or cynical. The prominence given by Sanskrit political literature to *danḍa*, usually translated as 'coercive force', has seemed to suggest that ancient theory divorced politics from morals. A study of the implications of *danḍa* suggests that this is not so, or that it is too simple an assumption.

The Sanskrit texts use several terms that are partly inter-changeable, *danḍa* being one, and devote some attention to the philosophical significance of them. Without getting too involved, it would be well to notice briefly what they mean.

Dharma is difficult to translate but means something like the moral order, and a *dharmasāstra* is thus a text on law or morals or religious duty. *Artha* is material goods or material welfare, and an *arthaśāstra* is a text on politics. There are precious few; the one known as 'the *Arthaśāstra*' is the one attributed to Kauṭilya, the minister of Chandragupta Maurya around 300 B.C. (though the text we have was probably put together some centuries later). It can also be called a work on *danḍanīti*.¹ *Nīti* literally means 'guidance' and is used variously to imply management, statecraft, moral principles and good conduct. *Rājadharmā*, the king's duties or statecraft, is equivalent to *nīti*; *nītiśāstra* is a science referred to by several sources.²

A Knot of Ideas

There is no need to be confused by this; all that matters is that there is a knot of ideas involving *danḍa* in which politics, law, morals and

order are unravelled. Thus the theories that legitimize government fuse might with right.

It is worth emphasizing that moral and material standards are not two opposed categories in the minds of our authorities (except perhaps the Buddhist ones). *Artha*, material welfare, and *dharma*, morals, are not independent sciences. The two are distinguishable, but they are not divorced from each other. It is true that the *Arthaśāstra* says that *dharma* and *kāma* (the pursuit of pleasure) are rooted in *artha*. It is true that to the Buddhists politics seemed a corrupt science. But when all is said and done the fact remains that politics appeared to people to be governed in principle by considerations of *dharma*, whether or not they saw principle constantly breached in practice. To fathom the workings of politics was to analyse a king's *dharma*. Any *śāstra* is moral, irrespective of its content. A lot has been written, fairly enough up to a point, about the 'secularity' of the *Arthaśāstra*, which is cynical in parts, pragmatic, prepared to use religious beliefs as a means to an end. But the discussion is then chiefly about the quality of thought that it displays, not the category to which it belongs. This category is the class of texts that interpret *dharma*.

There is no need to go at length into this matter and explore the similarities to Machiavelli, which are clear enough and have been amply demonstrated by various scholars. We could, if we wished, find evidence on the other side—the *Arthaśāstra* has plenty of superstition in it, fantasy, whimsy. In many ways it is impractical and thoroughly unrealistic. But what matters here is simply that the author of the *Arthaśāstra* and Machiavelli appeal to different sorts of legitimizing idea: the one to the idea of a king who was divinely appointed and preserves the order of society; the other to the idea of a ruler who governs, controls, organizes, maintaining himself by playing off his potential opponents and beating Fortune into submission as one beats (or apparently Machiavelli beat) a woman. If we pass on from a general consideration of the purposes of the texts to an investigation of the meaning of *daṇḍa*, we shall find this distinction confirmed.

Also Connoted Moral Authority

Daṇḍa means literally 'stick.' This stick was probably the herdsman's goad in early pastoral times. Questions of history or political theory cannot of course be answered definitively by an appeal to etymology, but at least the literal meaning of such a word entitles us to an initial presumption which can be tested against other evidence. The presumption is that the king's power of force, if that is how we translate *daṇḍa*, was thought of as similar in kind to that of the herdsman using a stick, which

does not compel the animal but indicates the way it should go. The indication is accepted because the herdsman's authority is acknowledged. There is a suggestion here that *danḍa* connoted moral authority of a paternal sort at least as much as physical force.

Gautama derives *danḍa* from the root 'dam' (tame, control), albeit wrongly, and sees it as the instrument of *dharma*, suppressing and punishing its violators.³ Similar definitions, relating *danḍa* to *dharma*, occur in various other places.⁴ In Manu *danḍa* is spoken of as an instrument for keeping even the gods and demons to the straight path.⁵

Danḍanīti as we noticed is a science equivalent to *arthaśāstra*; as such it is eulogized in several sources.⁶ In the *Mahābhārata* it is implied that if there is no king to wield *danḍa*, wifehood and wealth will perish.⁷ That is, the bonds of respect between man and man that are based on social institutions will be loosened, because there are no king and no *danḍa* to uphold these institutions. Here *danḍa* is intimately associated with protection and preservation, an idea of the king's function implicit everywhere in the *smṛtis* and *śāstras*. It is implied by the myth of the golden age, the fall of man, and the need for an authority to represent *dharma*, moral duty, and keep men in their appointed paths, protecting them against their natures.

The Golden Mean

It is a big question with the ancient authorities as to what degree of severity a king ought to employ. The centrifugal tendencies of the administration and the close link seen between the king's authority and the security of classes and communities meant that there were fears of grave dangers from insufficient use of *danḍa*, but there is much discussion of the evils that will result from its excessive use and, presumably, abuse. A king that is mild is despised; a king that is harsh is feared, and causes his subjects to suffer; therefore a good king will mix mildness with severity and strive for the golden mean. This is the unanimous conclusion of various authorities.⁸

Our concern here is with the meaning of *danḍa* and how it fits into the ideology of kingship. The references considered certainly show that 'punishment' or 'force' might often be serviceable translations, but they also suggest that these terms alone are quite inadequate to represent the full meaning of the word in its original contexts. *Danḍa* did not mean something that in principle could develop into army rule or police terror, because these things would be breaches of the king's *dharma*, and *danḍa* was the interpretation of *dharma* to secure the ends of justice. Given human nature it was considered necessary for the preservation of the equilibrium of society.

In the *Śāntiparvan*, Vaiśampāyana eulogizes *daṇḍa* and claims that it ensures rewards in this world and the next for a king.⁹ It is the exclusive duty of *kṣatriyas*; it rules over all, it is alert, it protects, it is equivalent to *dharma* and upholds the three ends of life (*dharma*, *artha* and *kāma*); *daṇḍa* was established in this world for preventing mortals from falling into confusion and for the preservation of their property; it was prescribed for saving the four *varṇas* from confusion; without the protection of *daṇḍa* people would sink in dense darkness, the strong would roast the weak on a spit, no student would study the Veda, no cow could be milked; the sense of 'mine' would be lost; no servant would obey. The whole world is food; only those gods are honoured who slay and eat; gain for one arises only through destruction for another. The implication here is that after the fall of man, in the dark age (*kaliyuga*), it is only *daṇḍa* that can maintain the obligations of *dharma* and keep men in their degree.

O! When degree is shak'd,
Which is the ladder to all high designs,
The enterprise is sick. How could communities,
Degrees in schools, and brotherhoods in cities,
Peaceful commerce from dividable shores,
The primogenitive and due of birth,
Prerogative of age, crowns, sceptres, laurels,
But by degree, stand in authentic place?
Take but degree away, untune that string,
And hark! what discord follows; each thing meets
In mere oppugnancy: the bounded waters
Should lift their bosoms higher than the shores,
And make a sop of all this solid globe:
Strength should be lord of imbecility,
And the rude son should strike his father dead:
Force should be right; or rather, right and wrong—
Between whose endless jar justice resides—
Should lose their names, and so should justice too.¹⁰

Essence of Rājadharmā

Clearly *daṇḍa*, described as it sometimes was in association with the metaphysical description of the world, is conceived of as more than coercive force—as a cosmic principle. The *Daṇḍa* at its highest is the whole essence of *rājadharmā*. The same idea—that the king exists on earth for wielding *daṇḍa*—is found in other places. Nārada says

that, if the king does not apply *danḍa* against those who have fallen from their duties, they will perish, the *brāhmaṇas* will slay each other, the *kṣatriyas* betray each other, the *vaiśyas* abandon their tasks and the *sūdras* get mastery over all.¹¹ Bṛhaspati says that nobody is exempt from the king's punishment if he has fallen from his *dharma*, and anybody of whatever rank who fails in the duties laid on him by his position must be punished.¹² *Danḍa* is partly equivalent to *bala*, 'army,' but in these passages it is taken to reside in the workings of justice and it is as such that it should chiefly be considered.

What emerges from the examination is, not that 'coercive force' is always the wrong translation, but that this translation lacks the rich store of ideological and mythological connotations that *danḍa* had for the Indians and does not convey its significance as a cosmic principle.

Principles of Justice

Kāmandaki says that without *danḍa* jungle law prevails.¹³ But he also gives the clue to the basis of *danḍa*'s legitimacy: a wife obeys even a poor or crippled or otherwise defective husband through the fear of *danḍa*.¹⁴ Implicit here is an appeal to the law of moral cause and effect (*karma*): disobedience to a rightful master will produce unpleasant results in the form of *danḍa*, which may well be violent or coercive, but do not depend purely upon the master's physical resources: they depend upon fate. Disobedience causes punishment, but it is not actually necessary, though it may be the case, that the master is the punisher. If he is, he is acting as the agent of *karma*, retribution, which would otherwise operate through another medium. When the king employs *danḍa*, he may be using force, but if another man used force in the same way to thwart a rightful king that would not be *danḍa*—it would be the sinful conduct of fallen man (*mātsyanyāya*). Clearly much depends on the point of view; two rivals might both consider themselves rightful kings. But the point is that *danḍa* was more than a physical thing. It meant the principles of justice at least as much as the punishment, and implied the right to punish, which was instinctively accepted, at least as much as an act of violence.

This discussion of the term is an exercise in interpretation of political theory only, and the present chapter is concerned with an understanding of the ideas that people had, not of political realities. There are no conclusions that can be drawn from the discussion about the political conduct of kings. It would be quite unhistorical to suggest, for example, that as a result of having these ideas instilled into them kings tried to be fair to their subjects and were alert to the dangers of letting crime

go unpunished. No doubt conscientious kings were like this anyway, but how far the *dharmaśāstras* actually influenced their behaviour can only be a matter of guesswork.

Unity Symbol of Loose Kingdoms

But an inference of some sort is, however, possible, though a general one, about the sort of society indicated by the ideology we have been considering. What the idea of *daṇḍa* shows is a belief in kingship as an agent of moral cause and effect (*karma*) to maintain the observance of the duties enjoined by the moral law (*dharma*). That, rather than a state constitution, gives the institution its legitimacy. The maintenance of *dharma* is seen as a matter of keeping men to the duties of their own classes and communities (*varṇāśramadharmā*), of maintaining the distinctions that were felt to be necessary to make a hierarchical and fragmented society viable. What this reflects is, not that ancient Indians either were or were not very conscientious in the observance of the rules for their groups, but that these groups were important to them and that they had strong loyalties to their groups (quite possibly to the caste subdivisions rather than to the over-arching *varṇas*). This is not a particularly novel inference, but it may serve to remind us that Indian kingdoms were not like modern states; they were patchwork quilts of communities and kingship symbolized their unity.

NOTES

¹As in the *Daśakumāracarita*, pt. 2. p. 53, 11.10–12.

²Eg. Mbh. 12.59.74; Kām. 1.6.

³Gaut. 11.28.

⁴Matsya 225.17; Mbh. 12.15.8; Mn. 7.17–25.

⁵Mn. 7.17.23. *Deva-dānava-gandharva-raksāsī patagoragāḥ Te'pi bhogāya kalpante daṇḍdenaiva nipīditāḥ*.

⁶Eg. Kām. 2.36–44; Matsya 225.4–17.

⁷Mbh. 12.57.41.

⁸Mbh. 12.56.21; A.Ś. 1.4; Kām. 2.37.

⁹Mbh. 12.15.

¹⁰*Troilus and Cressida*, Act I Sc. 3.

¹¹Nār. 18.14–16.

¹²Bṛh. 1.9.15–16.

¹³Kām. 2.40.

¹⁴ibid. 2.43.

CHAPTER IX

FEUDALISM

On the basis of research so far published, it is difficult to speak precisely about the nature of Indian empires and political relationships as they developed from the time of the Mauryas to the time of the Guptas. Of the Mauryan empire it has been said : 'The extreme rapidity with which the empire was built up, and the equally striking rapidity with which it broke up, point to a confederate rather than a unitary state.'¹ Another authority refers to the 'centralized control of the Mauryan government over areas which gradually lost their independence and were included within the extensive political and economic system planned by the government.'² The Gupta empire six or seven centuries later has been described as an area where one kingdom was paramount, a sphere of influence, rather than a unified dominion.³ Of the Guptas, the first authority says : 'The most striking fact that emerges from the study of the Gupta inscriptions is that the empire was dominated by feudalism and the very idea of a kingdom had become that of a feudal-federal organization. Every real kingdom is an empire.'⁴

Application of Term to India Contested

The word 'feudalism' is often used to characterize the pattern of political institutions that is seen developing as inscriptional sources yield more information in the early centuries of the Christian era. Scholars have given different analyses of the early Mauryan empire and the later empires (of which the Guptas' is the most prominent and best documented example), and have drawn the contrasts between earlier and later patterns in different ways. 'Feudalism' has not generally been given an exact definition, and the usefulness of the term in application to ancient India has been contested.⁵

Two claims will be made here. The first is that we do not possess evidence that enables us to distinguish between the structures of Mauryan and later empires with any confidence. The second is that it is very difficult to say whether empires, either early or later, were feudal in any particular sense, but they may very well have been.

We have seen above the nature of the evidence touching on the Mauryan empire. Dating from early centuries A.D. there are various sources

which give much more abundant information about the claims and dominions of later kings and emperors. The activities of the Gupta dynasty in particular (fourth to sixth centuries A.D.) are attested by various inscriptions.

Political Fragmentation

These sources introduce us to certain features not noticed in the evidence about the Mauryas. These include the adoption of more high-flown imperial titles reflecting perhaps a hierarchy of vassalage and overlordship, the apparent independence of local communities and groups of villages which appear as petty feudatories, the apparent independence of many state officers, who often seemed like petty monarchs, and the apparent delegation of authority in the widespread practice of making land grants. These all seem to represent a process of political fragmentation in which control is increasingly delegated or slips away from the centre.

Leaders of Confederacies

The currency of imperial claims was progressively debased. Kings ran through the whole gamut of royal designations. The *Amarakośa* gives the following terms, all meaning a king: *rāja*, *pārthiva*, *kṣmābhṛt*, *ṛpa*, *bhūpa*, *mahīkṣit*; and the following all meaning a king with feudatories: *adhīśvara*, *chakravartin*, *sārvabhauma*.⁶ Emperors used progressively more grandiloquent titles. Huviṣka in one inscription figures as a great king, supreme king of kings, son of the gods.⁶ Elsewhere is found a supremely venerable sovereign of great kings.⁸ This shows how claims to sovereignty were inflated. We can see this as a reflection of political fragmentation if we suppose that kings of unified kingdoms are calling themselves overlords, sovereigns of kings and so forth, because they are turning from heads of integrated states into leaders of confederacies of semi-independent local interests.

This is what appears to be happening. There are various signs of local self-sufficiency including the issuing of coins by guilds, and of coins and seals by villages. There seems to be a spawning of miniature feudatories; one, for example, possessed apparently only eighty-four villages.⁹

State officers, further, appear to be frequently independent or semi-independent. Some, with titles whose meanings are not entirely clear, were often hereditary and may have been maintained by grants of land.¹⁰ Officers such as *uparikas* could turn into petty monarchs and make kingly claims.¹¹ Governors emerged as hereditary kings, their provinces turning into kingdoms, and they took titles such as *mahārāja* and *mahā-*

sāmanta.¹² *Sāmantas* (vassals) were of different grades and sometimes had their own sub-vassals.

Land Grants and Delegation of Authority

Finally, we can add to this type of evidence of political devolution the abundance of land grants, often recorded on copper plates, which appear to indicate the practice of distributing land and delegating authority in the land granted to the donees.

Evidence such as this may indeed show an increasing formalization of political institutions. The *śāstra* literature of the period, with its pedantic and often fanciful classifications and divisions of every topic, shows the same kind of formalization, and we should not be surprised to find it paralleled in the terminology of *rājya*. But the evidence is not enough to show any particular difference in the degree of devolution of local autonomy between the Mauryan and these later kingdoms.

The reason for this is chiefly that the Mauryan empire and the sources for it do not provide a proper basis for comparison. There may have been some innovations between the two periods, such as the practices of issuing coins in villages and of leaving permanent records of land grants, but these practices do not demonstrate that there was any less local autonomy before. There could have been exactly as much devolution in Aśoka's India without any evidence surviving.

As for the land grants, the delegation of authority that they represent has often been exaggerated.

The form of grant became increasingly stereotyped and various terms specifying rights given or not given to the grantee constantly recur. A great deal has been written about such terms and it is often contended that judicial powers went with later grants. In many cases the grants specify that various classes of people including *cāṭas* and *bhaṭas* are precluded from entering the granted land.¹³ These two words are often translated 'regular and irregular troops' but the exact meaning is obscure. It is impossible to say how far this represents an assurance of autonomy to the grantee. Again, some later grants specify that the grant of land is made 'with the ten *aparādhas* (offences).'¹⁴ It has been suggested that this refers to the delegation of authority to deal with the offences, but it more probably indicates the fines for them among the other sources of revenue constituting the grant.¹⁵

The term *araṭhasavinayika* occurs in some grants in lists of rights that are excluded.¹⁶ This is translated with the text as 'not to be interfered with by the district police,' but the same applies here as in the case of the *cāṭas* and *bhaṭas*. A belief that these grants did indeed alienate authority

can affect the edition and translation of them, and this in turn can reinforce the belief. Another common term is *chauravarjam*. This 'means 'except for theft' and occurs as an exception in lists of privileges that are given with the grant. It probably means 'with the exception of the right to fines imposed on thieves,'¹⁷ thus fitting into the character of the grants as primarily alienations of revenue. In one inscription the word *upanaya* occurs at the end of a compound listing dues that are to be given to the grantees, and it is mistranslated 'obedient to (their) [the grantees'] commands.'¹⁸ It means 'the handing over' of the dues named, and does not indicate any delegation of authority.

There are of course many other pieces of evidence that may be seen as signs of judicial or political as well as fiscal alienations, but the evidence in general is too weak to justify confident conclusions.

Land Alienation in Mauryan Times

It is possible that kings made grants of land to supporters even in pre-Mauryan times. W. Rau, on the evidence of the *Brāhmaṇas*,¹⁸ and T.W. Rhys Davids, on the evidence of Buddhist literature,¹⁹ refer to cession of territory involving alienation of revenue in these periods. There is no reason to deny that the practice was known in Mauryan times if it was known before and after.

Evidence of the *Arthaśāstra*

Often the *Arthaśāstra* has been appealed to as testimony to the difference in degree of centralization between Chandragupta Maurya's administration and that of his Gupta successors. If the *Arthaśāstra* was not composed by Chandragupta's minister Kautilya, the comparison is inappropriate; but at least the text is likely to precede the Guptas by a century or so, and the comparison may seem to offer a clue to the evolution of political institutions between the second or third centuries A.D. and the fourth or fifth. The *Arthaśāstra*'s organization of revenue under the king, for example, may be contrasted to the Gupta administration under which tax collection was by feudatories in the empire.

The contrast rests on the assumption that the unit depicted in the *Arthaśāstra* as an organized whole is in fact an empire. But our examination of the *maṇḍala* suggests that it is no more than the home territory, whose ruler may be an overlord of other kings or a feudatory of another.

Again, the *Arthaśāstra*'s picture of an efficient bureaucracy may be contrasted to the looseness of Gupta control. But our examination of administration suggests that the *Arthaśāstra* is not evidence of any efficient bureaucracies.

These two features—the facts that the text does not describe an empire, and that it is not an empirical description—vitate any attempt to contrast its author's background with that of the Gupta inscriptions. The state of our knowledge about the characteristics of empires at different times does not allow us to distinguish periods and describe them satisfactorily.

Feudal Empires

An overall characterization of Indian empires seems a more hopeful project. They have often been described as feudal, and in writing about them it is constantly necessary to use such words as 'feudatory.' It is obvious from the inscriptions and from the *śāstras* alike that conquest was seen as a means to imperial glory, and that at least in some periods (perhaps in all) defeated kingdoms kept their autonomy and were regarded as tributaries for as long as the victor's might made the claim seem supportable, or even longer. The loose sense in which the term 'feudalism' is often used seems to apply quite properly to what we know of Indian empires.

It is worth the attempt to see whether a more detailed study of the empires, and a more exact definition of feudalism, sustain this characterization. J.W. Spellman, for example, has argued that they do not.²⁰ He has two arguments. The first is that feudalism should be understood as a distribution of land in exchange for service within a kingdom, not as a system of tributary relations with other kingdoms such as Indians had. Within the Indian kingdoms, it is not known that a king would parcel out land to his supporters as we require for the definition. The second is that the feudal contract is voluntary, a promise of allegiance in return for tenure, whereas Indian tributaries were coerced by defeat or diplomatic pressure.

Difficulty of Definite Conclusions

The purpose here is not to dispute the usefulness of these distinctions but to suggest that there is a fudginess both about the idea of feudalism and about the Indian political relationships that makes clear-cut conclusions difficult.

The difficulty with 'feudalism' is that of choosing between a stylised hierarchical theory and a number of different situations in actual practice. There is a conventional picture of a king who has the land at his disposal and distributes it to barons who fight with him; these in turn subdivide it, so that there is a hierarchy of obligations, a pyramid with the hapless serfs at the base. In practice this system was complicated by variations

of usage. In England the Norman conquest made possible something like a systematic parcelling out; across the Channel the position of the French monarch was very different, and provincial lords were more independent.

It seems fair to compare Indian practice with European practice rather than with European theory, but there is no single European practice that should obviously be taken as standard. And the work of mediaevalists tends increasingly to diminish the usefulness of our received ideas about the system: 'slavery' as the condition of the serf, who has often considerable security, is misleading; 'ownership' of the land as a specific legal right identifiable at a particular point in the feudal hierarchy cannot easily be attributed to particular individuals; power relations between kings and lords do not fall into a precise pattern.

Distinction Between Lordship and Enjoyment

The difficulty with the Indian empires is rather the same: 'ownership' of the land, as we understand ownership, is a right that is difficult to attribute to particular individuals; we cannot derive the system from the king's sovereign power to control the resources of the land and dispose of it freely; we cannot identify an aristocratic hierarchy that belongs to a kingdom and is contained within it.

In the first place, the rights that a king had over the land in his kingdom cannot be defined in a straightforward way. The practice of granting land implies some idea of ownership, but the rights of revenue, the primary purpose of land grants, do not, as far as we can see, entail free use and disposal of agricultural or any other land. It has been considered relevant in this context that some grants give separate pieces of land in a village,²¹ which would not perhaps be expected if the entire land were the king's to give.²² In other inscriptions, sub-donation is made with the king's approval.²³

Manu in one place, dealing with treasure trove, says that a *brāhmaṇa* may keep all of what he finds because he is lord of all (*sarvasya adhipatiḥ*).²⁴ (This is paraphrased by the commentator Kullūka *sarvasya prabhu*.) Two verses later it is said that the king is entitled to half of the treasure in the ground because he gives protection and because he is lord of the earth, *bhūmer adhipatiḥ*. If this is not to be a contradiction, the term for lordship here must mean something more general than formal ownership. Kātyāyana says that the king is lord (*svāmi*) of land but not other wealth, and is therefore entitled to the sixth-part share of the earth's produce.²⁵ That the king is lord of the soil (and water) but not other things is an idea formulated by some authorities

including Kātyāyana.²⁶ According to the *Mīmāṃsā Sūtra*, land is common to all people.²⁷ The commentary of Śabara adds that the king's right to his share is given by protection, but other people who use the land also have rights.

There has been considerable discussion by modern authorities on the subject of land ownership. P.V. Kane considers the views of various ancient writers, noticing in particular the statement in the *Vyavahāramayūkha* that the 'gift' of land entails maintenance of the donee, no ownership of the land by any but the actual occupiers being involved, and leaves the suggestion that ancient laws did not accord proprietary right to the sovereign.²⁸ Similarly A.S. Altekar notices various pieces of evidence, including inscriptions, leading to an empirical distinction between land effectively owned by the king and other land.^{28a} U.N. Ghoshal, giving the subject extended treatment, notices the sources suggesting royal ownership, and goes on to show the distinction between royal lordship limited to various rights and duties, and actual ownership.²⁹ Elsewhere he notices two parallel principles, one of state ownership or support and the other of its limitation.³⁰ R. Thapar refers to a gradual change, whereby kings did not own land at first but became later the sole owners of land.³¹ J.W. Spellman concludes that the king's lordship of the earth was symbolic rather than economic, but that he was also, in his capacity as head of the state, the owner of the land as much as anybody was.³² W. Rau detects legal land ownership on the part of the king as early as the time of the *Brāhmaṇa* texts, a right derived from the king's first claim on the land by right of conquest.³³ C. Drekmeier says that ownership need not have had the same meaning then as now.³⁴

Though there are disagreements and differences of emphasis here, what is not positively disputed is the distinction between direct ownership and lordship. We can conclude that a king had direct ownership or enjoyment (*bhoga*) of some lands and claimed lordship (*svāmya*) over all. Several of the views just cited are consistent with this. The question that remains is what is meant by lordship, *svāmya*.

Lordship was legally attributed to the king because of his divine function which entitled him to a share of the produce of the land. His claim to be lord, *adhipati*, of the land was of the same sort as that of the *brāhmaṇas* to be *adhipatis* of everything; ownership in this sense was a consequence of the nature and function of the owner rather than enjoyment of the object owned. An object could logically be owned by two people if their functions gave them rights over it that did not conflict. To some extent, this sort of ownership, *svāmya*, is simply not relevant to the question of land ownership in the modern sense.

The modern sense is to be distinguished both from the actual enjoyment of land by the holder and from the rights claimed by a baron or a king. It is possible that the modern sense of ownership had little meaning then. It must be remembered that for a great part of India's history there was plenty of land for everybody; those who had any reason to do so could migrate and start new settlements, at the cost of the labour of clearing and irrigating the earth. Farming a piece of land would give some rights over it, and being king of the farmers would give others, but there was no need for the exclusive rights connoted by complete ownership.

The regressive system of residual rights found in some African tribes seems to offer a better analogy to Indian practice. A headman would have disposal of a piece of land if the cultivator's heirs failed or if he forfeited his claims to it; a chieftain would have similar rights in relation to the headman, and so on up the hierarchy. (Escheatment of property to the king is a principle set forth by several authorities in some matters such as death without an heir.³⁵)

No Evidence of State Control

So far a distinction in theory only, the distinction between lordship and enjoyment, has been considered. The suggestion is that kings had the direct enjoyment of crown lands scattered here and there, and by virtue of their office claimed lordship over all land. It is necessary to consider the argument that kings are seen in fact to have headed (at least in the India of the *Arthaśāstra*) totalitarian organizations directing agriculture throughout their kingdoms, whether or not they were legal owners of the land. There is evidence of government interest in village planning,³⁶ but this does not demonstrate that state control was all-obtrusive. Some evidence for direct interference in local affairs may be seen in a chapter of the *Arthaśāstra*, where migration is dealt with.³⁷ The king who wants to found new villages may do so either on an old site, or on a new one through an influx of immigrants. He is to see that a village contains at least a hundred families, and at most five hundred. The population should be mostly of *śūdra* cultivators. There is no coercion here, however. Kings were to rely on inducements (*anugraha*) whereby cultivators were provided with seeds, cattle and money, which were returned in easy instalments. This is consistent with the *Arthaśāstra's* policy of giving remissions which should benefit the treasury in the long run. It is not evidence of state control.

Alternative evidence of state control of rural life has been seen in the person of the *Arthaśāstra's* superintendent of cultivated land (*sitā-*

dhyakṣa).³⁸ He is to know all about the science of agriculture and trees, or at least to have competent advisors. He is also to collect corn, flowers, vegetables, fruit, bulbs, hemp and cotton seeds, and employ on his staff slaves, labourers and prisoners. He is to sow seed on crown lands. This last phrase translates *svabhūmau*, which T. Ganapati Sastri and K.A. Nilakantha Sastri interpret as referring to the workers' own individual fields.³⁹ This, however, is not in accord with the normal use of the word *sva*, and the translations of J.J. Meyer ('auf geeignetem Boden') and R. Shama Sastri ('on crown lands')⁴⁰ seem to be justified by the context.⁴¹ Thus far there is no evidence that the official concerned is responsible for more than the land directly enjoyed by the king.

'Water Portion'

Later in the chapter occurs the statement that they (the workers) should provide 'from their own embankments' (*svasetubhyo*) a 'water portion' (*udakabhāga*).⁴² This portion varies according to the method of irrigation used, being greater for more efficient methods (varying from a fifth if water is raised by hand to a third if it is raised by mechanical apparatus).⁴³ This has been given some analysis leading to the conclusion that the water portion is contributed by cultivators in the neighbourhood to the irrigation of the king's field.⁴⁴ R.P. Kangle sees it as a water rate to be contributed by farmers in general to a rural official, varying according to the methods of irrigation that they have themselves established.

It may be permissible to see the contributors of the water portion as employees on crown lands, who supply it from the private plots which support them.

Sītā

The chapter is anyway likely to deal with the duties of an officer in charge of the king's fields, and describes in great detail how crops are to be raised and how labour is to be employed. Some authorities have seen the *sītādhyakṣa* as an arch-bureaucrat responsible for the cultivation of the entire country.⁴⁵ But it is likely that in fact his domain was restricted. A distinction is made in the *Arthaśāstra* between *sītā* and *rāṣṭra*, the second including all manner of levies such as the standard one-sixth of the peasants' crop, and there are different categories of stores brought in to the storehouse superintendent.⁴⁶ It makes better sense to suppose that the yield from *sītā* was from a particular class of land—in fact the king's own.

Nature of Ownership

What we see from these considerations is that as a result of his func-

tion of protecting the earth a king was considered to have a right to a part of the proceeds of it and in this sense was the lord of it. There was not a royal land monopoly giving him the right to dispose of it freely, and we do not observe that kings organized and controlled the resources of the land. In the lands which were granted, the grantees were assigned the various revenues of the territory but the king kept his judicial and other authority over it as far as we can see. In the lands which were ruled by feudatories, the feudatories similarly collected the revenue; they passed on a certain amount in tribute, depending on the power of their overlord. They assumed responsibility for order in their kingdoms, and dispensed wealth to favoured individuals and religious orders, but the overlords also asserted vague claims over their kingdoms.

The difficulty in describing such a pattern in clear terms lies not only in the nature of ownership and disposal of land. It lies also in the confusion of home and foreign affairs, in the lack of a distinction between the inside and outside of a kingdom. We cannot say with confidence that a kingdom was a definable area with state officers and grantees collecting revenues inside it, feudatories collecting them outside it. The result is that officers, grantees and vassals are not three distinct classes. They are a single class of aristocrats, great men in the *maṇḍala* any of whom, if fortune favoured him, might make a bid for the dignity of kingship, seeking patronage from one or another king in the area.

Sāmanta means 'vassal,' but occurs as a title of various individuals who appear from their other titles as officials. In the Bhanskhera Plate of Harṣa, Skandagupta is *maḥāpramātāra-maḥāsāmanta*.⁴⁷ He is both a high official and a great vassal. In the Jesar Plate of Siladitya, Mammaka is *sandhi-vigrahādhikṛta, divirapati, maḥāpratihāra, sāmanta*.⁴⁸ He is responsible for peace and war, chief of clerks, great doorkeeper, vassal. Inscriptions figure ministers who behave more like barons than bureaucrats. A departmental minister, *amātya*, is the donor of a *maṇḍapa*.⁴⁹ A commander-in-chief endows a well.⁵⁰ A storehouse keeper appears in the middle of a list of the king's relatives.⁵¹ A list of dignitaries includes minister, royal chaplain, general and doorkeeper.⁵²

Nature of Polity

If a feudal monarchy is an ordered system, a kingdom independent of other kingdoms in which there is a sovereign king who disposes of the land and revenues of the country to his supporters, it is difficult to find an ancient Indian kingdom that fits the definition exactly. But it may be difficult to find a European kingdom also. What is found in ancient India is a group or following clustered round a king, who dispenses sinecures

and revenues to his chief supporters, retains aristocrats at his court and seeks to secure himself against other royal factions in the area by war and diplomacy.

¹B. Prasad, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

²R. Thapar, *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (Oxford, 1961), p. 94.

³H.N. Sinha, *Sovereignty in Ancient Indian Polity* (first edition), pp. 301ff.

⁴B. Prasad, *op. cit.*, p. 285.

⁵See J.W. Spellman, *Political Theory of Ancient India* (Oxford 1964), pp. 163–170.

⁶*Amarakoṣa*, 2.8 (*kṣatriyavarga*), 1–2.

⁷E.I. vol. 1., p. 386 (A).

⁸C.I.I. vol. 3, p. 70, line 3.

⁹E.I. vol. 19, p. 72, line 8.

¹⁰See C.I.I. vol. 3, p. 119, lines 21–23.

¹¹C.I.I. vol. 4, p. cxli.

¹²See Lallanji Gopal, *loc. cit.*, pp. 33–36.

¹³E.g. C.I.I. vol. 3, pp. 95f and following grants.

¹⁴E.g. C.I.I. vol. 3, p. 179, line 67.

¹⁵P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra* (Poona, 1930–1956), vol. 13, p. 265.

¹⁶E.g. E.I. vol. 8, p. 73, line 10; p. 71, line 4.

¹⁷See the *Journal of Indian History*, vol. 38, pp. 590f.

¹⁸W. Rau, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

¹⁹T.W. Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India* (London, 1903), p. 48.

²⁰J.W. Spellman, *loc. cit.*

²¹E.I. vol. 3, p. 321.

²²See A.S. Altekar, *State and Government in Ancient India* (Delhi, 1958), pp. 276f.

²³C.I.I. vol. 3, p. 135.

²⁴Mn. 8.37.

²⁵Kāt. 16–17.

²⁶*ibid.*

²⁷Jai. 6.71–3

²⁸P.V. Kane. *op. cit.*, vol. 2. pp. 865–869.

²⁹A.S. Altekar. *op. cit.*, pp. 273–277.

³⁰U.N. Ghoshal, *The Agrarian System in Ancient India* (Calcutta, 1930), pp. 81–103.

³¹*idem.* *A History of Indian Political Ideas* (Bombay, 1959), pp. 175, 320–321.

³²R. Thapar, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

³³J.W. Spellman. *op. cit.*, pp. 203–210.

³⁴W. Rau, *op. cit.*, pp. 15–16 (para. 10).

³⁵C. Drekeimer, *Kingship and Community in Early India* (Stanford, 1962), p. 265.

³⁶A.S. 2.27.2–3; Vas. 3.13–14; Gaut 10.36–38, 43–45. J.W. Spellman. *op. cit.*, p. 210 also refers to African tribes.

³⁷See Mn. 8.237; Yāj. 2.171 on pastures round a village.

³⁸A.Ś. 2.1.

³⁹*ibid.* 2.24.

³⁹T. Ganapati Sastri (ed.), *Arthaśāstra* (Trivandrum 1921–1925); K. Nilakantha Sastri, *History of India*, pt. 1. (Madras, 1950), p. 177.

⁴⁰J.J. Meyer, *op. cit.*, R. Shama Sastri (trans.), *The Arthaśāstra* (Mysore, 1923).

⁴¹*Bahu-hala parikṣtāyām svabhumau dāsa-karmakara-dandapratikartṛbhir vāpayet*, Cf. *J.R.A.S.* for 1929, p. 90.

⁴²A.S. 2.24.18.

⁴³The editions of R. Shama Sastri and of Drs. Jolly and Schmidt attach the first word, *svasetubhyo*, to the preceding sentence. Those of T. Ganapati Sastri and R.P. Kangle render it as it is here interpreted : *Svasetubhyo hastappravartimam udakabhāgam pañcamam dadyuḥ* etc. which makes better sense (the preceding sentence would otherwise refer to the workers' fields as hard to cultivate, unwarranted by the context).

⁴⁴J.J. Meyer, *loc. cit.*, n. 3.

⁴⁵E.g. B. Breloer, *Kautaliya-Studien* (Bonn. 1927), vol. 1. p. 75.

⁴⁶A.S. 2.15.2–3.

⁴⁷E.I. vol. 4. p. 208 at p. 211, line 14.

⁴⁸E.I. vol. 22, p. 114 at p. 120, line 62.

⁴⁹A.S.W.I. vol. 4, p. 103, no. 11.

⁵⁰E.I. vol. 16, p. 235.

⁵¹E.I. vol. 20, p. 22.

⁵²E.I. vol. 4, p. 307, line 67.

CHAPTER X

DISCRIMINATION

We have to rely for much of what we know about the relations between groups in early society upon a body of literature that is a product of one of these groups; naturally this raises a doubt, which historians usually realize well enough, about the objectivity of the sources and the picture they give us. The *smṛtis* and *śāstras* abound in rules and prescriptions that favour the priestly estate, the *brāhmaṇas*, but these texts were themselves composed by *brāhmaṇas*. It may be possible to treat them as evidence for some purposes, such as to interpret the moral and legal codes enshrined in them, or to understand ancient social theory, because for such purposes the texts can be accepted on their own terms and the examination has the nature of exegesis. But can they be accepted as historical evidence? Does their fanatical discrimination reveal anything of the actual conduct of the society they describe? The fact that a theory was held; or that advice was given, does not mean that kings, judges or village elders actually conformed to the theory or took the advice. It would be an abuse of history to assume without other evidence that they did.

Pro-Brāhmaṇical Ideology

One line that it would be possible to take is to assert that the *brāhmaṇas* were powerful and influential, and were able to use their position to propagate an ideology that favoured them. They were like puppeteers. It will be suggested here that there is no need to see the matter quite like this. Other peoples in society had to have reasons for accepting the ideology, and these reasons are what matter.

Another possible line could be that the *smṛtis* and *śāstras* cannot be used as evidence of relations between classes in real life, because for all we know they may be no more than wishful thinking on the part of the *brāhmaṇas*. There is, however, no need to go as far as this : the ideology could not exist in a vacuum.

The texts are not like parish magazines, which would give to a historian of posterity a false impression of the role of the church in the life of a country if they were the only sort of historical source available. The texts were produced by a class of people that was important and active in the direction of public affairs.

Fusion of Ideas

Part of the explanation of this is that politics, law, morals, religion and metaphysics were treated as one subject, and to be expert in one was to be expert in all. This fusion of ideas is evident from the very nature of the texts, and it is an important fact about the language of people's thought. The treatment of moral offenders was not a subject separate, from the punishment of crimes. Thus the *Arthaśāstra* deals with sexual offences, laying down punishments for offences by a man with a woman not his wife and against her will, with immature girls, with mature women of the same and different class, and so forth.¹

Justice and Religion Not Distinguished

Justice and religion were not distinguished.² Jurists described punishments for failure in religious observance. The *Arthaśāstra* deals with the consumption of forbidden food or drink by the *varṇas*.³ Penances are prescribed by Manu.⁴ The king's treatment of priests and ascetics is part of the science of statecraft; he is to respect heretical groups, for example,⁵ just as he is to respect local customs.

Influence of Brāhmaṇas

Thus the *brāhmaṇas* and their lore were not a separate department of life without practical involvement in legal judgments or political affairs. In both spheres kings depended on them. Chandragupta Maurya had a *brāhmaṇa* minister who is represented in the later drama *Mudrārākṣasa* as the real power behind the throne. He may not have been, but it was not thought implausible that he should be portrayed as such. Again, this same minister had the important *Arthaśāstra* attributed to him. He may not have written it, but it seemed reasonable that he should have done so. *Brāhmaṇas*—those at least who advised and officiated in the capital cities—were professionals with a technical expertise.

What there is no space to demonstrate here, but what cannot fail to impress anyone who reads the *smṛtis*, is that the science of *dharma* was highly developed, and had a mystique of its own. P.V. Kane's monumental work on *dharmaśāstra* makes a thorough survey of that science—its analysis of authority and authoritativeness, its provisions for trial procedure, with elaborate provisions for assessment of witnesses and fairness to defendants, its prescriptions of varied penalties and its carefully thought-out codes of penology. It is a genuine discipline, in the academic sense.

This is not to say that the administration was actually fair, in treating people as equal before the law. It did not. Nor does it mean that justice

worked in an impartial way in practice, with a scrupulous regard for the principles of the texts. There is every evidence that corruption of all sorts was so common as to be taken for granted. The point is that *brāhmaṇas* and their law were esteemed and thought important. A trial scene in a drama, for example, shows that the *smṛiti* of Manu was relied on in courts; and there was a great deal of fairly sophisticated juridical argument about the interpretation of law-givers like Nārada.⁶ According to Manu the king was to enter the hall of justice every day with *brāhmaṇas* and ministers to decide cases.⁷ In various sources it is said that the administration of justice is to be the king's responsibility but he is to have the help of *brāhmaṇas*.⁸ Kātyāyana says that the king will reach heaven if he examines disputes before the judge, ministers, *brāhmaṇas*, royal chaplains and magistrates.⁹

The authority for some of these provisions is of course the brahmanical literature itself. We can infer that the *brāhmaṇas* around the king were influential and had considerable claims to moral authority; not that they were puppeteers pulling the strings. The final authority for deciding a case was the king's. His orders had to some extent the force of law; the law itself placed 'the umbrella of sastric moral authority' over certain classes of his decrees.¹⁰

Types of Discrimination

But there were classes of *brāhmaṇas* in positions of considerable influence, power and responsibility, and the things that were said in the brahmanical literature were taken seriously. Some of these things favoured *brāhmaṇas*. Not only in the provision of penalties for misdemeanours of all kinds, but in every matter touched on where it is possible to specify the superiority of one class over another, or the means by which they shall be kept distinct, our sources insist upon the distinction. If this insistence had seemed ridiculous, as it would in modern western society for example, it would merely have made the *brāhmaṇas* a laughing-stock. We can only assume that it seemed legitimate, and a survey of some of the types of discrimination may help to show why.

Grading of punishments by *varṇa* is common throughout the *Arthaśāstra*'s fourth book. *Brāhmaṇas* were to be banished only, not executed. Manu prescribes as much.¹¹ Gautama says that (rather than be executed) *brāhmaṇas* should be prevented from doing the same thing again, be proclaimed thieves, be branded, be banished, or given similar punishment.¹² Death is however recommended for *brāhmaṇas* in some cases: causing abortion, theft, killing a *brāhmaṇa* woman or a chaste woman.¹³ Also relevant is the problem of the murderous *brāhmaṇa*, who may be

killed in self-defence according to one view,¹⁴ or not, if he is exceptionally worthy, according to another.¹⁵ What is significant is the existence of the dilemma, which the jurists could not easily resolve.

It appears that the variation of penalty did not always work to the advantage of the higher classes. In Manu *vaiśya*, *kṣatriya* and *brāhmaṇa* incur proportionately greater guilt than a *sūdra* in certain cases.¹⁶ Kātyāyana applies the rule to cases generally.¹⁷ The reason is that the higher *varṇas* were judged to be more aware of the seriousness of their crime. Normally it worked the other way however: a *brāhmaṇa* defaming members of the other estates was liable to a fine of 50, 25 or 12 *paṇas* in the case of the three other estates respectively,¹⁸ whereas the defamation of a *brāhmaṇa* laid the other three (*Kṣatriya*, *Vaiśya*, *Sūdra*, in that order) open to penalties of 100, 150, 200 *paṇas* or cutting off of the tongue.¹⁹ That Manu and Kātyāyana take subjective guilt into account suggests that the concern of justice was with motives, and therefore imagined spiritual consequences, as much as with the incidence of crime.

Law was not to be taken into private hands except against offenders of low social worth, who could be punished on the spot.²⁰

Privileged Position of Brāhmaṇas

Other allusions show the high place of *brāhmaṇas* generally. Privilege at law was not limited to penalties but extended to trial. Sages and ascetics were not to be tortured.²¹ *Brāhmaṇas* were to be subjected to the ordeal of balance only (this was not a form of advanced torture).²²

The remission of taxes followed from the special position of *brāhmaṇas* in the king's counsels. Not all *brāhmaṇas*, however, were directly involved in counsel, or were necessarily very learned. It was therefore a vexed question what exemptions were proper.²³ Lists of exemptees usually include *śrotṛiyas* (learned *brāhmaṇas*). The dictum of Gautama that *brāhmaṇas* were exempt²⁴ was modified. It was held to apply only to the very learned. There may be an allusion to the exemption of *brāhmaṇas* on the occasion of a victory in the Hāthīgumphā inscription.²⁵

Maintenance—Special Responsibility

Treasure trove of *brāhmaṇas* was not to escheat.²⁶ *Brāhmaṇas* had claims on land grants, of which many were made to them.²⁷ It was said that the earth belongs to the *brāhmaṇas*, and that conquered land is to be given to *brāhmaṇas* of learning and character (this may refer to the revenues of such lands).²⁸ This is a facet of the claim made by *brāhmaṇas* on the king's support. To maintain them was considered to be a particular responsibility of his.

Special Status

The idea of the special status of the *brāhmaṇas* was a feature of the social order and went back to Vedic times when it came to be held that a king oppressing them would incur divine wrath.²⁹ Buddhist times and Buddhist literature know the idea of equality, or something more like it, but with these we are not here concerned. The interesting thing is that in the period of the brahmanical literature discrimination between different estates is advocated as if it were self-evidently proper: the question in all the passages that have been cited is not whether *brāhmaṇas* should be treated as different, and superior, but how the superiority should be reflected in practice. Nobody defends discrimination against proponents of equality; it is taken for granted as a way of life.

Special Responsibilities

There is no need to look for any brahmanical conspiracy as an explanation of *varṇa* inequality; they could not claim superiority unless it was consistent with the ideas that people already had about themselves and their society. As experts in matters that touch on the inner workings of the universe, in the whole sphere of sacred lore, they seemed entitled to privileges like the senior members of any community. And, like the senior members of any community, they had special responsibilities too. That alone can explain the fact that sometimes the differentiation in penalties actually worked against them. Their guilt was greater because their standards of conduct were supposed to be higher. Such a feature would not appear in a literature that was simply class propaganda to benefit the *brāhmaṇas*.

Philosophy of Justice

It is not necessary to suppose anything about the working of these laws in practice. The point is simply that the *smṛtis* were accepted as important and authoritative because they were consistent with the common stock of social ideas. There were the ideas that men were governed by a moral law that set out for them, according to their birth, the complete mode of life appropriate to their conditions in particular communities or stages of life, that to conform to this special mode of life would generate merit and secure a higher rank in the next life, that to violate it would generate guilt and incur penalties in this life or the next, or both. These ideas are reflected in the whole philosophy of justice implicit in the *smṛtis*.

In assessing this philosophy, it is necessary to decide whether there was any prevailing purpose behind it all, such as deterrence, prevention, reform, or redemption. There are two general types of purpose: moral,

whereby a culprit is held morally responsible for his misdemeanours, and social, where the object of justice is reform.³⁰

Prevention is a method appropriate to the social purpose of penology. It is not much mentioned by the authorities. Kātyāyana expresses the prevention principle clearly when he says that a *brāhmaṇa* guilty of an offence deserving death or mutilation should be kept in prison, doing nothing, to keep him out of mischief.³¹ However, prison was most often thought of as a substitute for fines, or as a variant of corporal punishment, or as a reprisal for *lèse-majesté*.

The principle of reprisal, by which an offending limb or tongue was cut off, characterized Indian penology, particularly in early times. Manu and others prescribe the cutting off of a limb for a man of low caste offending a *brāhmaṇa*.³² This principle does not necessarily imply any reasoned approach to the problems of justice, but it is perfectly consistent with the doctrine of redemption. If the belief is sincerely held that a *brāhmaṇa* has vastly more worth than other men, it is logical to attribute vastly more guilt to the man who offends him; if this means savage punishment or expiation, the fault is not with the penance required but with the belief in the *brāhmaṇa's* worth.

The execution of justice has many purposes, but it appears that the prevailing belief was that the purpose of justice was to secure the ends of *karma* by bringing the results of a crime home to the offender. According to the doctrine of *karmavipāka*³³ sins in this life produced evil results in the next. If it was held that these results would follow anyway, regardless of any punishment, it would be an argument for mild penalties. Generally though it was considered that the passing of the golden age made *daṇḍa* necessary. 'Now that men are overwhelmed by greed and hatred, judicial proceedings have been established.'³⁴ The king was a divine agent and responsible for the good results of good actions, and evil of evil; his own *karma* was tied up with that of men. On Manu's authority we learn that a king who punished those who should not be punished, or failed to punish those who should be punished, went to hell.³⁵

One can imagine why the first ruler to be chosen was said in the myth to have been reluctant to take on the job. But what interests us is the rationale behind all this. It looks like deterrence. Men were to be deterred from wrongdoing by the fear of punishment.

Conventional thinking about the purposes of justice is sometimes rather confused. It is common to see punishment and reform as different, even opposed, principles. Deterrence is classed with punishment and prevention as an idea that springs from interest in the victims of crime chiefly, reform as one that springs from interest in the criminal. But

perhaps the distinction mentioned above between the moral and social purposes is more useful. The social purpose is to secure harmony and see that people keep the law. This involves both protecting people from each other and doing things to culprits that will prevent them from repeating their crimes. Punishment can only be defined as doing things to people for this sort of reason. Reform similarly can only be defined in this way. The difference, if any, is in the nature of the things that are done : punishment is supposed to be unpleasant for the criminal, whereas reform need not be—though it may. Being required to show responsibility and constructiveness might be thoroughly punishing to some people; the security and irresponsibility of prison life might be quite congenial to some. What matters is that there is supposed to be a change of behaviour at the end of it. Deterrence, punishment, reform—all alike belong to the behaviour-regulating philosophy, which in any particular case will choose whatever emphasis happens to seem most effective.

Moral Basis of Discrimination

The moral purpose on the other hand is to be distinguished from all these techniques. It implies the doctrine of *karma*—evil actions produce evil results. If there is no come-back on the criminal in this life, there will be in the next. Justice, as administered by government, is an attempt to redeem him by wiping the slate clean. This gives him a chance to generate some good *karma*. And it is this view that underlies the whole doctrine of *daṇḍa*, it is this view that rationalizes discrimination and consists best with the fostering of different groups in society, each with its distinctive functions and duties. Whatever happened in practice, discrimination was an idea acceptable in principle because it fitted in with the ideology common to society as a whole—the conceptions of order, of hierarchy, of the distinctiveness of groups held in a delicate balance by the maintenance of the customs and traditions that defined them and distinguished them and made it possible for them to co-exist.

NOTES

¹A.Ś. 4.12.

²Cp. N.C. Sen-Gupta, *Evolution of Ancient Indian Law* (Calcutta, 1954), p. 336.

³A.Ś. 4.13.1.

⁴Mn. 9.240.

⁵Yāj. 2.196.

⁶*Mṛcchakaṭika*, Act. 9.

⁷Mn. 8.1–2.

⁸Vaś. 16.2; Yāj. 2.1; Vi. 3.72; Nār. 1.2.

⁹Kāt. 56; Cp. Mn. 8.1–2; Yāj. 2.1.

¹⁰See J. Duncan M. Derrett, "Bhāruci on the Royal Regulative Power in India," in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 54, no. 4. (1964), pp. 392–395.

¹¹Mn. 8.124.

¹²Gaut. 12.43–44.

¹³Kāt. 806.

¹⁴Brh. 1.23.17.

¹⁵Kāt. 801. (in the case of *utkṛṣṭe tapaḥ-svādhyāya-janmataḥ*).

¹⁶Mn. 8. 337–338, Cf Gaut 12.13–14.

¹⁷Kāt. 485.

¹⁸Mn. 8.268; Cf. Gaut. 21.1; 6–10.

¹⁹Mn. 8.267; cp. 8.279ff.

²⁰Nār. 15 (vākpāruṣya), 11.13.

²¹A.Ś. 4.8.19.

²²Yāj. 2.106.

²³See P.V. Kane, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 143–145.

²⁴Gaut. 8.12–13.

²⁵E.I. vol. 20, p. 72. line 9. This follows the Sanskritization *brāhmaṇebhyo jaya-parihāram dadāti* of D.C. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions* vol. 1 (Calcutta, 1942), p. 212. K.P. Jayaswal reads in the original *jātim parihāram*. See also B.M. Barua, *Old Brahmi Inscriptions in the Udayagiri and Kandagiri Caves* (Calcutta, 1946), pp. 17, 44. The reading is dubious.

²⁶Gaut 10.44; Vaś 3.14.

²⁷E.g. C.I.I. vol. 3, pp. 236ff.

²⁸Mbh. 12.73.9–12.

²⁹AV. 13.3.1–25 (refrain).

³⁰Cp. P.V. Kane, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, p. 393.

³¹Kāt. 967.

³²Mn. 8.279; Yāj 2.220.

³³See Mn. 11. 47ff and P.V. Kane, *op. cit.*, vol. 4, pp. 172–178.

³⁴Brh. 1.1.

³⁵Mn. 8.128.

CHAPTER XI

THE TREASURY

Some facets of ancient Indian kingdoms—notably of the Mauryan empire, and of whatever kingdoms the *Arthaśāstra* may exactly represent—seem surprisingly modern. The omnipresence of the state, the elaborate bureaucracy, the multitude of government activities with public works and welfare programmes, the organization of commerce and the control of agriculture through the *sītādhyakṣa*—such a set-up reminds us of the mid-twentieth century. The Mauryan state has been described as a vast industrial and trading concern,¹ and various scholars have been impressed by the degree of organization suggested by such works as the *Arthaśāstra*.²

Not Modern

The qualifications that need to be made to such an interpretation are suggested in various other chapters here, but there is still room for some treatment of the government's collection and its employment of revenue. This particular aspect of government activity has contributed especially to the impression of modernity. But in the light of what has been suggested in other chapters, under the headings of bureaucracy and other things, a few comments on what is already well known about the administration of revenue may show that it was by no means modern.

Principal Heads of Expenditure

There is plenty of evidence, which need not be detailed, that many things were considered fit objects for government expenditure. The construction of a capital city with all its fortifications, maintenance of roads leading from it to other towns, the building of dams, famine relief and the maintenance of large storehouses with emergency supplies, support of the destitute, aged, widows and so forth, and benefactions to religious sects and *brāhmaṇa* priests—these are the principal heads of expenditure that were important, and it is an impressive list. The collection of funds to pay for all this also seems to have required an elaborate organization, and the whole taxation system seems bewildering in its complexity.

It is not to be denied that kings who were both wealthy and

conscientious may have undertaken varied and far-reaching programmes of expenditure. Some, like Aśoka and Rudradāman, made claims in their inscriptions which suggest as much. But several considerations weigh against these programmes being characterised as modern.

The unit of administration was not necessarily an empire, even the administration of a great emperor. Each vassal had his own machinery of government and his own responsibilities to his subjects, and the overlord might finance some projects in his feudatory kingdoms for show or as part of a bargain but was chiefly concerned, so far as we know, with his home territory, which might be quite small.

There were not enormous state monopolies that required huge capital outlay. A king did not own and control all the agricultural land in his kingdom. There were monopolies but these involved licensing private interests rather than nationalization.

Aśoka sent his *dhammamahāmattas* far and wide beyond the home territory, and these may have dispensed largesse in various forms, but this did not mean that they controlled the areas they traversed any more than the Peace Corps controls Africa and Asia.

Various remissions of taxation are prescribed by several authorities, and some of these can be seen as signs of far-sighted economic policy designed to allow the taxpayer to nurture and increase his profitability. Trade taxes, for example, were supposed to be adjusted according to the cost price of goods, their prospects of sale, the distance they had been carried, and the expenses involved.³ The honeybee theory of taxation—it should be delicate, so as not to injure the payers and make them unable to pay again later⁴—shows that there was awareness of the benefits that would accrue to the treasury from a policy of taking less than was actually possible for the sake of long-term gains.

This much is true, but it is not true that kings threw all their resources into the stimulation of a liquid economy.

In the first place, interest rates were too high to encourage the development of credit in its modern form. They were usually over 10% p.a. and interest was usually charged in *paṇas* per hundred per month. The *Arthaśāstra* specifies rates varying from $1\frac{1}{4}$ to 20 (i.e. 15%–240%).⁵ Yājñavalkya mentions rates varying from 10 to 20 for trade over dangerous routes.⁶ Though Megasthenes was wrong in saying that Indians did not know how to lend or borrow, high risks seem to have been powerful brakes.

Heads of royal expenditure are briefly summarised in the *Mānasollāsa* where it is said that every year the king should spend three-quarters of what comes his way and save the rest.⁷ In the first of two relevant

passages, an instructive list of eighteen items is offered by the *Arthaśāstra*.⁸ The first four concern the king's household, the fifth, messengers, the next five, storehouses and other buildings, the next, corvée, and of the remainder four are military. These give some idea of categories and hint at proportions but are not explicit. In another chapter we learn that a quarter of the income should be spent on salaries and services. It is said that superintendents over a hundred or a thousand employees should provide for their food and wages. This suggests that employees of departments were largely provided for out of departmental receipts, probably before these entered any central accounts.

Hoarding

From the evidence that kings liked to live in style, it is also easy to believe that as much was spent on the royal household as on welfare. Significant is the concern with building up reserves. Kāmandaki says that the treasury should have few outlets and many sources.^{8a} Kings accumulated great sums. A run of bad seasons would reduce the people to destitution, and, apart from the expense of relief to a king with a sense of responsibility, sources of revenue were likely to dry up and running expenses would have to be financed from reserves. If it is accepted that the state of general insecurity, and the unreliability of the king's men to whom embezzlement seemed natural and reasonable, had the effect of making revenue generally unpredictable, this gives added point to the belief in big reserves.

The philosophy of hoarding is diametrically opposed to the organic theory implicit in modern practice; wealth lying idle in a storehouse or a palace vault was so much dead weight and a drag on the economy. The treasury simply was not seen as a channel for the redistribution of public funds to boost the economy and foster public welfare. It was used largely for military purposes to enhance the king's glory and, in the conventional view of the matter, to protect *dharma*. It was used partly also to maintain the king in the style of life to which he was accustomed. It was not used to finance nationalized industries on a large scale. It was used partly for welfare, but this translates *dāna* which means 'giving' and could just as well be rendered 'charity'.

According to the Jūnāgaḍh inscription, ministers objected to the cost of repairing the Sudarśana dam and so Rudradāman financed the work 'from his own treasury' (*svasmāt kośā*).⁹ This could mean that he financed it from his own pocket, implying that there was a distinction between privy purse and public treasury. It could also very well mean that, alternatively, he financed it from the treasury, which was anyway regarded

as his own, instead of raising the funds *ad hoc*. It is not serious evidence that a distinction was drawn between private and public funds. Taxation was implicit in the office of kingship, but this does not mean that the revenue was considered to belong to the public and to be held in trust on their behalf; it means that it was held to be a part of *rājadharma* to rain down benefits on the people even as the sun, imitating the action of other divinities, draws up vapour and then returns it to the earth.

Even as the way in which revenue was distributed is consistent with our view of *rājadharma*, so the way in which it was collected is consistent with our view of bureaucracy.

How Much Fiscal Centralization?

Monopolies were claimed by the government. The *Viṣṇudharmasūtra* claimed that all produce from mines belonged to the king.⁹ Other authorities made the analogy with theoretical royal overlordship of land, and declared that, as in the case of crops, a certain share of the produce (a sixth or an eighth) goes to the king.¹⁰ Salt was a monopoly to the extent that the government made some, took a share of all private manufacture of it, and took a one-sixth tariff on imports.¹¹

Elephants were another monopoly. But, as we have already noticed, the fact that they were described as a source of revenue suggests that the monopoly might take the form of a claim to a tariff, percentage or licensing fee. The monopolies were not necessarily constituted by effective nationalization but were chiefly a facet of the many-sided activity of revenue collection.

One of the six boards responsible for municipal administration noted by Megasthenes was to deal with trade, weights and measures.¹² The superintendent of merchandise whose duties are described by the *Arthaśāstra* had considerable responsibility for the supervision of trade.¹³ He was expected to be familiar with the state of the market, and was to control the level of prices. Market controllers are mentioned who are to keep the king's own wares in a box.¹⁴ These appear to be supervisors rather than salesmen. Exports and imports of goods are to be carefully studied with an eye to profit. The responsibility here is probably for the king's own merchandise. A list of dues had to be taken into account including the share due to the foreign king.

The duties of the trade overseer are described in another chapter of the *Arthaśāstra*.¹⁵ He is to supervise the market and levy fines for sharp practice. These are prescribed in some detail, with variations according to the nature of the offence and the amount of profit involved. Techniques mentioned include restrictive practices by mutual agreement,

rigged weights and measures, adulteration, substitution, and deceitful sales promotion generally. The chapter is notable chiefly for its detail. It is likely that a great deal of fraud went on, being taken for granted and regarded as a source of revenue that could be conveniently tapped by the system described. If Greek evidence is to be believed capital punishment was one of the measures adopted by the Mauryas to deal with tax evasion.¹⁶ This could well be a sign that tax evasion was notoriously rife.

It is stated in the same chapter that market rates are determined by the king. When specified causes produce a rise in prices the king takes the excess profit. Clearly what is intended here is not so much a communistic piece of control as a convenient technique for extracting money from trade. Other provisions can be seen in the same light. The toll collector is to catch all merchants at the city gate, note their names and addresses, register their goods and check stamps.¹⁷ Penalties are prescribed for forging stamps, mis-stating particulars of merchandise, and so forth. It is likely that all the *Arthaśāstra*'s allusions to trade control reflect not the iron heel of bureaucracy but a highly intricate game between the king's men and commerce.

Types of Tax

Several types of tax were known. These were variously designated and it is not always easy to distinguish between the meanings of terms, or to know whether there was any hard-and-fast distinction. Kāmandaki describes eight general sources, the *aṣṭa-varga*.¹⁸ These are agriculture, trade routes, the capital, embankments, elephant-catching, mines and gold, levies from the rich, and the founding of towns and villages. The *Arthaśāstra* makes various classifications.¹⁹ One list gives as sources : city, country, earthworks, irrigation, forests, herds, and trade routes. Another list is : *mūlya* (sales receipts), *bhāga* (contribution), *vyājī* (compensation, as levied in the market), *parigha* (literally 'bolt'; apparently a gate due), *kṛpta* (fixed tax), *rūpika* (separate tax) and *atyaya* (fine).²⁰ There appears to be little scheme here. *Bhāga* and *atyaya* may have been the biggest sources but only speculation is possible. There are numerous sub-divisions which are given. In particular, *rāṣṭra* is amplified as *sītā*, *bhāga*, *bali* and *kara*, which thus appear to be distinguishable. Another classification is : *anyajāta* (incidental), *vartamāna* (running), and *paryuṣita* (outstanding). Rudradāman claims in the Jūnāgaḍh inscription that his treasury was filled with rightfully obtained *bali*, *śulka* and *bhāga*. The claim suggests that some kings made extortionate exactions not sanctioned by the *smṛtis*.

The *ṣaḍbhāga* was fixed in *smṛtis*—the traditional sixth-part share of the crops. That the king should take a part of the value of crops was a standard principle enunciated by various authorities.²¹ In practice this was liable to be exceeded when the need arose and it was provided by the *Arthaśāstra*, Manu and others that in time of distress this might be raised to a quarter or a third. The *Arthaśāstra* lays down that such an exceptional levy shall not be repeated during the course of any one emergency.²² There is no telling how often this was honoured in the breach.

Bhāga is the share exacted from ordinary lands not the king's own. *Bhāga* and *ṣaḍbhāga* are loosely and variously used. The *Arthaśāstra* uses both. The first occurs in the account of the duties of the superintendent of the storehouse.²³ It has been suggested that a distinction between *ṣaḍbhāga* and *bhāga* was known to the *Arthaśāstra* on the strength of two passages²⁴ which may show that *bhāga* was a variable levy.²⁵ The second of these prescribes variation of extraordinary levies according to types of soil. These extraordinary levies were extra exactions in emergencies and not necessarily governed by the same principles that governed *bhāga*.

Bali is mentioned in the *Mahābhārata* and elsewhere as a rate of one sixth,²⁶ but it is not necessarily the same thing as *bhāga* or *ṣaḍbhāga* though sometimes interchangeable (as in the first passage cited). One authority notices some ancient and modern interpretations of the term and concludes that it was an 'undefined cess' over and above the *bhāga*.²⁷ In the *smṛtis* *bali* is equivalent to the grain share, but it appears that in Vedic times it was the common term for tribute : the people are described as *balihṛt*.²⁸ In the Rummindei inscription of Aśoka it is possibly distinguished from *bhāga*,²⁹ as in Pali sources.

Kara is a general term and covers dues on property among other things. For the *Arthaśāstra* it is an emergency tax on dealers, or tax in general, or property tax.³⁰ The commentators describe it as an annual tax and as a tax on movable and immovable articles.

The number of types of tax is legion. Some others are, for example, excess levies, levies on festive occasions, *ad hoc* levies for the army, shore and river village levies, harbour dues, and lump assessments on villages. The most notable feature of the revenue system is its random and inconsistent spawning of terms. What this suggests is that the justification for taxation lay, in the minds of the taxers, less in any rational pre-enacted scheme with the sanction of law than in the mere availability of revenue at its source. There was no smoothly working scheme. It needs to be understood that income was actually determined not solely

by tables of rates neatly drawn up for budget day but by the energy and honesty of officials, which were not predictable. It was a contest between taxers and the taxed, and the former drew up the rules *ad hoc*. Painstaking study of the evidence can be greatly complicated by the assumption that there is a code behind it all, and that every word has a precise meaning.

No Totalitarian Control

A survey of some of the references to taxation can only suggest the same sort of picture as the references to administration in general: there is an elaborate structure designed to give effect to the government's wishes, but we are left largely in the dark when we enquire how efficiently it worked and what it actually achieved. What happened to all the money that royal servants, under one name or another, prised out of artisans, merchants, villagers, fishermen? How often were receipts given? What proportion of the revenue in any particular kingdom went to grantees, to the officials who collected it in payment of salary, without entering central treasury or accounts, to officials who collected it, for distribution of salaries to junior officials? How far was discretion to vary taxes according to the nature of land or of merchandise used as a lever to make deals with citizens? Which is the better metaphor to describe the revenue apparatus: a vast industrial and trading machine, or a sea with fish swimming in it, drinking unobserved the water in which they move? To raise such questions is not to assert a particular sort of answer to them; it is to point to the shortage of evidence touching on the practical working of the system as opposed to the formal structure of it.

NOTES

¹See K.A. Nilakantha Sastri, *History of India*, pt. 1 (Madras, 1950), pp. 85, 116.

²E.g. R. Thapar, *op. cit.*, p. 78; N.C. Bandyopadhyaya, *Economic Life and Progress in Ancient India* (Calcutta, 1945), p. 304.

³Mn. 7.127.

⁴Mbh. 5.34. 17-18; cp. Mn 7.129, 140.

⁵A.Ś. 3.11.1.

⁶Yāj 2.41.

⁷*Mānasollāsa*, 2.539-540.

⁸See A.Ś. 2.6.11; 5.3.1.

^{8a}Kām 4.60.

⁹Vi 3.55.

¹⁰Mn. 8.39.

¹¹A.Ś. 2.12, 28-30; cf. I.A. vol. 18, p. 34, line 5.

¹²J.W. McCrindle, *Ancient India as described by Megasthenes and Arrian* (Bombay, 1877), fragment 34, p. 86 at p. 87.

¹³A.Ś. 2.16.

¹⁴ibid. 2.16.14.

¹⁵ibid. 4.2.

¹⁶J.W. McCrindle, *loc. cit.*

¹⁷A.Ś. 2.21.1–2.

¹⁸Kām 5.78.

¹⁹A.Ś. 2.15.1–11; 2.6.1–10; 2.12.35–36.

²⁰ibid. 2.6.10.

²¹Gaut 10.24; Mn 7.130; Vi 3.22–23.

²²A.Ś. 5.2.30.

²³A.Ś. 2.15.3.

²⁴A.Ś. 253.3; 5.2.2–3.

²⁵U.N. Ghoshal, *Contributions to the History of the Hindu Revenue System* (Calcutta, 1929), p. 35.

²⁶Mbh. 12.69.24; 12.72.10; Mn 7.80; Matsya 215.57.

²⁷U.N. Ghoshal, *The Agrarian System in Ancient India* (Calcutta, 1930), p. 36; cf. p. 58 n. 1.

²⁸R.V. 7.6.5. Another term was *dāna*: see W. Rau, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

²⁹*Aṭha-bhāgiye* may however mean 'partaking in prosperity'. See S. Paranavitana in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 82, pp. 163–167.

³⁰A.S. 5.2.17.

CHAPTER XII

KINGDOMS AND COMMUNITIES

The suggestions made in earlier chapters provide a view of the relationship between kingdoms and other communities which is rather different from the views that are often accepted. Some of these suggestions may therefore be recapitulated.

Not enough is known about the kingship structure of the Vedic tribes or about their forms of government. Certain clans or other kinship groupings seem to have claimed seniority and to have provided the élite and the military leadership.¹

The kingly or warrior estate of society was in some sense descended from this élite. Kings were not constitutional heads of states; they were members of this élite who had succeeded in establishing authority in particular areas.

Their claims were not limited in geographical extent and brought them automatically into competition with other kings. Warfare was endemic.

There was a theory of royal divinity but this did not make a king a unique individual. It was equivalent to a statement that a king was performing the function of upholding tradition and protecting *dharma*.

The relationship between a king and any other powerful member of the élite was informal and depended on personal influence rather than regulations. Another *kṣatriya* influential in an area might be a state officer representing the king, or a vassal, or an independent king.

Empire was made by influence over other kings, often as a result of defeating them. It was not a bureaucratic Leviathan. Each constituent community was autonomous.

The relation between a kingdom and another community could not be clear-cut; it might be difficult to say whether the other community was inside it, or outside it, or subject to it, or independent of it.

Kings were not secure in their home territories, but constantly feared enemies within their own families, intriguing nobles and unreliable officials, all of whom might group around rival claimants.

These features indicate a fluid political situation in which members of the political élite compete for power, sometimes in groups under leaders who make unique claims to kingly authority.

The normal view of the political landscape is this : there were distinct types of community that were different from each other : kingdoms, 'republics' (*gaṇas*), and local caste and other groups (*vargas*). The first two types were units of government, and between them they filled up the map of India with their territories. After early times *gaṇas* were swallowed up by expanding empires. *Vargas* were not units of government; they were included in and subject to the territories of the other types of community.

The view offered here is twofold. A distinction must be drawn between ancient Indian ideas and ancient Indian practices. In the first place, the ideas—whose function was to reduce complex universe to an ordered and therefore intelligible system—pictured their communities in the same way, with distinct categories being regarded as different. There were kingdoms in which single individuals had authority; and there were kingless communities in which assemblies of *kṣatriyas* (who might or might not represent all the families in the communities) shared authority.

In the second place, ancient Indian practices did not fall into such a pattern. Communities in reality could be arranged on a spectrum. There were those in which powerful kings held undisputed sway. There were those in which various powerful *kṣatriya* families, sometimes related to each other, were constantly at loggerheads and produced insecure and short-lived dynasties of *rājas*. There were those where no single claimant could get his authority recognized and government was carried on by debate among the *rājas*, or *kṣatriyas*. There were those small communities that consisted of descendants of aristocratic clans, who called themselves *rājas* and were effectively like any other caste group. There were those small communities that were bound by kinship or occupation, and ran their own affairs while acknowledging the authority of whatever *kṣatriya* in the vicinity was in a position to assert it.

Thus the view is of a situation that contains the same ingredients as the conventional interpretation of the scene. It accepts that the categories normally distinguished were important in the Indians' own scheme of ideas. It merely spreads these ingredients about, so that what is postulated in practice is a spectrum of communities rather than a series of unique categories. This is not a revolutionary thesis, but it has some significance for our understanding of the way in which institutions worked.

Types of Community

The Sanskrit texts contain numerous terms for political and other

communities or forms of authority : *vairājya*, *dvairājya*, *rājya*, *gaṇa*, *kula*, *śrenī*, *saṃgha*, to name the most familiar. There has been some debate about the meanings of some as forms of government. *Vairājya*, for example, has been interpreted as republican government.¹ The Vedic origin of the term was *virāt*, 'glorious king', and ancient etymologists described it as rule distinct from or, more likely, superior to (*vaiśiṣṭya*) that of other kings. The 'other' implies kingship. The *Arthaśāstra* compares *vairājya* to double rule, unfavourably.² Here it is said that a foreign ruler treats the kingdom oppressively and carries off its wealth. What is meant is foreign rule, inclusion in an empire which is in a position to extinguish the power of the local *rāja*.³

No more does *dvairājya* introduce us to a novel form of constitution. It means double rule, and according to Greek evidence one government at least was run by two hereditary houses. This inference may have been vitiated by the supposition of a Spartan model. Princes were often associated as *yuvarājas* with their fathers in ruling a country, and this might be known as double rule. The institution was notoriously prone to dissension and conflict, though the *Arthaśāstra* prefers it to foreign rule, whereby a foreigner bleeds the country.⁴

Not all references to kingless countries (*arājya*, *arājaka*) are allusions to anarchistic or republican constitutions, nor are all terms used in treatment of government formal and rational systems. *Arājya* was probably no more than a term describing what happened when a throne fell vacant, and failure of descent or some other reason prevented it from being occupied at once, though it has been seen as a particular type of community.⁵ Thus far there is no real evidence of types of community essentially different from monarchies, though we might choose to regard double rule as the first step towards a shading off into oligarchies.

According to Arrian, a deputation to the conquering Alexander from one city asked how a single city could continue to be governed if it was deprived of a hundred of its best men.⁶ The city in question was also said to be ruled by the aristocracy. Greek writers speak of other Indian towns as city states. A *Mahābhārata* passage⁷ and the coins issued at certain towns have, together with these references, been interpreted as evidence of the existence of city states.

Since a city state might control the surrounding countryside, and the area controlled from the capital of a kingdom might be very small, the essential difference between the two types of community must be in the form of government rather than in the size. As for this, no doubt the standard of government would have been affected by the loss of a hundred good men whether authority were vested in one man, or

any number. The liability of the Greek original or secondary sources to imagine a Greek pattern in what they described needs to be treated with reserve. There is no need to conclude that there must have been city states exactly, but there certainly were in the north-west of India in Alexander's time, and in other parts at other times, small communities in which authority was vested in assemblies or oligarchies rather than in kings. This is another matter, and it is one which has occasioned a good deal of scholarly discussion and enquiry. These kingless communities—the most common term for them is *gaṇa*—have often been described as republics and regarded as democratic institutions. By others they have been described as oligarchies. They were certainly regarded by ancient Indians as different from kingdoms.

Gaṇas and Kulas

Several other words are also used to refer to these institutions. *Gaṇa*, *saṃgha* (assembly), *śreṇī* (guild or association), and *kula* (family) flow into each other in the Sanskrit usage. The grammarian Pāṇini confirms the equivalence of the first two.⁸ The *Arthaśāstra* says that after a king's death, government may be by the *kula*.⁹ This suggests the possibility of oscillation between kingship and the hegemony of a lineage.

It is probable that in discussing *śreṇī* (guild) troops¹⁰ the *Arthaśāstra* is referring to *kṣatriya* communities that had not melted into agricultural society. It has been suggested that they were registered artisans who were allowed to carry arms.¹¹ but phrases such as *kṣatriya-sreṇī* and *rājaśabdopajīvin* (considered below) indicate the identity of *śreṇī* troops. Whether there were state regulations to determine who could carry arms is another question. That such authority was in at least one period assumed by the king is suggested by Nārada : the king is not to allow unjustified (better than 'unlawful'—the word is *ahita*) carrying of arms.¹² But there are two sides to this coin : men could carry arms if they felt they had reason to do so. Bṛhaspati on *samayas*, agreements, gives an example : the case of local self-help in defence against thieves.¹³ Clearly the king's authority in the matter was negative : he could punish people for carrying arms if it constituted public danger. There is no evidence of registers of men eligible for carrying arms or call-up in the *Arthaśāstra*, where it might be expected.

The king's family (following the *rājanya* Vedic élite) was involved in government, being appointed to the highest posts, and this differed from *kula* government only in degree.

The *Arthaśāstra* speaks highly of *kula* rule which, it says, is difficult to conquer. Elsewhere, it says, that *saṃghas* are invincible because of

their unity.¹⁴ The varying use of words suggests that they are descriptive rather than titular and refer to distinguishable situations rather than institutions. The terms used refer sometimes to communities bound together by living in the same place or following the same occupation, sometimes to a particular ruling family or clan.

Pāṇini distinguishes *samghas* that live by arms (*āyudhājivin*) from those that do not.¹⁵ The *Arthaśāstra* describing *gaṇas* says that some practising agriculture are *vārtāśāstropajivin* (living by agriculture and arms), and some are *rājaśabdopajivin*, 'living on the name of kings,' an obscure term that could refer to living on contributions, or be sarcastic, or both.¹⁶

It is reasonably clear what sort of institution we have here. It is an aristocratic clan, sometimes perhaps a branch that split off from a line living somewhere else. It might gather followers round itself and become an aristocracy ('living on the title of kings'), or it might merge with, or give its name to, a community ('living by arms and agriculture'). Unless there are customs which prevent the development, nobility can fan out in the course of intermarriage until the whole of a small community can claim noble descent.

Since in a monarchy the king's family is involved in government, or competing for government, the distinction between a kingdom and an aristocratic *gaṇa* looks like one of degree. It only wants a single member of a *gaṇa*'s leading clan, or lineage (we do not know enough to use such terms precisely) to call himself the king, *rāja*, and we have a kingdom. And it happens that in early times just this sometimes occurred.

It would be tempting to claim that the *rājā* in a 'republic' was elected, or in some way constitutionally appointed, and the term *rāja* was simply a convenient one for his office. It was not the same thing as the succession by primogeniture, hedged with divinity, that characterized a monarchy.

This is how it would be necessary to defend the distinction between 'republic' and monarchy as a significant distinction in kind. But if it turns out that *gaṇas* were not formally constituted republics with elective office; and if primogeniture was a label for competition between related families, divinity was a fairly common-or-garden attribute, and the chief feature of a throne was its instability: then, however important the distinction between *gaṇa* and *rājya* may be in the ancient ideology, it does not amount to a difference in kind between functioning institutions in practice. In one, the competing members of the family, clan, lineage, or whatever it is, are held to be the rulers. In the other, the most successful single member is held to be the ruler.

There were probably enormous differences between extreme types.

The *gaṇas* were more 'tribal.' None of them was very big. The kingdoms, from Buddhist times onward, became more and more complex political organizations, and larger. There is a qualification to this : what look like enormous empires are more likely to have been groups of effectively autonomous units. Still, the difference between a tribal gathering and a wealthy court could be great.

What these considerations show, then, is that in reality, as opposed to theory, *gaṇas* and monarchies are best arranged on a spectrum; they shade into each other. They are not opposite poles.¹⁷

What Happened to the Gaṇas?

So far, these communities have been discussed as if they were an enduring feature of Indian history, recognized throughout as a parallel category alongside kingdoms. It is well to recall here, though, that *gaṇas* as a form of government seem to belong mainly to a period from about the sixth to the fourth centuries B.C., when they flourished in the Punjab and to the north of the Gangetic plain. The Buddha himself came from one. Thereafter, monarchy became normal, and they were swallowed up by empires. '

This at least is the common view of them. But what does 'swallowed up' mean? Annexed? Integrated? Destroyed? If we accept that they disappeared, some further explanation is desirable. The theoretical literature that we use to analyse these *gaṇas* was current well into the Christian era, and mostly took shape around the beginning of it—after the heyday of the 'republics.'

Greek evidence, from the late fourth century B.C., vouches for Kśudrakas, Mālavas, Śibis, Ambasthas and others. The *Arthaśāstra*, which is likely to be based on some third century B.C. material and to have been put together some centuries later, refers to a number of *gaṇas*—Kāmbhojas, Saurāṣṭras (*vārtāśāstrapajivin*), Licchivikas, Vṛjivikas, Mallakas, Madrakas, Kukuras, Kurus and Pāñcālas (*rājaśabdopajivin*).¹⁸ Some of these correspond to the names of the independent communities of Buddhist times—Mallas, Licchavis, and so forth.¹⁹

There are *gaṇas* heard of before Aśoka Maurya's reign and again after. As late as the Gupta dynasty (fourth century A.D.) Mālavas and Yaudheyas figure among the vassals of Samudra.²⁰ This puts them in the same class as *mahārājas* (emperors—though the term was devalued somewhat by then). It is apparent then that the *gaṇas* were not destroyed. It can be claimed only that they lost their independence.

But there are degrees of dependence, and the question is still open whether the *gaṇas* lost their identity as autonomous communities.

It is possible to suppose that the later empires had bureaucratic engines of control, and that all the processes of decision-making went on at metropolitan centres. If we favour this view, it makes sense to say that the *gaṇas* dropped out of the picture. But what has been suggested in other chapters is that empires had no such characteristics.²¹

Gaṇa Organization

Gaṇas were not clearly distinguished from small communities such as guilds—the words used loosely to refer to these communities are enough to show this—and are best thought of as an enduring part of the patchwork of local groups that made up Indian society at all times. Like such other groups (*vargas*) they ran most of their own affairs most of the time.

They were not noted for stability and cohesion, and it is probable that the absence of central authoritarian rule disabled them from making claims comparable to those of kingdoms. In the *Mahābhārata* it is said that in *kulas*, quarrels break out and disrupt the community.²² Also it is said that through dissension, *gaṇas* are overwhelmed by their enemies.²³ Quarrels breaking out may destroy the *gaṇa*; *gaṇas* can be overcome by fomenting discord. The *Arthaśāstra*, on the other hand, speaks of the strength of *kula* rule: 'It is impregnable and not liable to loss of the king [as is monarchy; this rendering is more plausible than 'dangers associated with monarchy,' which would require *rājya*].'²⁴ This has already been noted as a likely allusion to the king's family. The proclivity to dissension in *gaṇas* is admitted by the *Arthaśāstra* elsewhere, when it describes in some detail ways in which spies can cause dissension between the rulers of a *gaṇa*.²⁵

Some authorities have postulated *gaṇa* constitutional details by analogy with the procedures of Buddhist communities. The Buddha is implausibly said in Buddhist tradition to have told king Ajātaśatru that the Vajji *gaṇa* would prosper while it observed seven conditions: frequent assemblies, concord, traditionalism in administration, respectfulness, non-abduction of women and girls, reverence for rites and shrines, and support for holy men.²⁶ From sources on Buddhist assemblies also can be borrowed apparent details of voting and other procedures. But more direct evidence of formal procedures is needed before we can postulate such rules.

Administrative details are not abundant; but *gaṇas* were normally controlled by assemblies. In the *Mahābhārata* it is said that all members of the *gaṇa* do not deserve to hear what policy is decided but the heads (*mukhya*) should meet together and decide what is conducive to its

welfare.²⁷ Assemblies took place in the assembly house, at least in the Śākya *gaṇa* at Kapilavastu, where a *rāja* was chosen. Relatives of the Buddha figure as *rāja*.

It is said that members of the *gaṇa* are of the same birth and clan (*jāti* and *kula*) but do not have the same intelligence, appearance and property.²⁸ It may be that a general equality of *gaṇa* members as *kṣatriyas* was recognized but it is not likely that all participated in the government by a formal franchise or other constitutional device, nor is there any real evidence of the existence of constitutions.²⁹ Policy was decided by an assembly of seniors like village elders. The *gaṇa* was distinguished in theory from monarchy as a type of government, the distinction being that rule in the *gaṇa* was not in the hands of a single *kṣatriya* king. In fact members and chiefs of *gaṇas* were commonly *kṣatriyas*, and often called themselves *rājas*. Families of *rājas* are referred to in the *Buddha-sāla-Jātaka*.³⁰ According to the *Mahāvastu* there were 168,000 *rājas* among the Licchavis.³¹ This could be an estimate of the size of a class of idle aristocrats, who might well be described as 'living on the title of *rāja*.'

It may be that *gaṇas* are not quite what they have usually seemed, that is, republics, or sometimes oligarchies. But it looks as if they are communities with widely diffused nobility and with a less elaborate political structure than the monarchies which developed in the Ganges plains. The two types of community shade into each other, but monarchies developed into loose empires in which other monarchies as well as *gaṇas* were vassals.

It would be interesting to explore the possible connections between these types and their economic circumstances, and it would be interesting to go further into the parts played by caste and kin in the early formation of them. There is plenty of room for more research.

Vargas

As for the other local communities (*vargas*), a revealing feature of the part they played is the *samaya*. This is an agreement between *vargas*, which are *gaṇas*, *saṃghas* (corporations), *grāmas* (villages), *kulas*, *śreṇis* (guilds), small caste groups or other communities.³² According to Brhaspati, a *samaya* was a compact made in an affliction or for the purpose of *dharma*.³³ Under the terms of the compact two, three or five advisors were to be appointed and their advice was to be followed. Various examples are given. In a drought, all are to contribute for a religious sacrifice. When there is trouble in the neighbourhood from robbers, each house is to contribute an armed man. An assembly house,

or a rest-house for travellers, or a temple, tank, or garden is to be made; rites are to be performed for the poor and helpless; famine-stricken people from other parts are to be kept away. Such provisions show how much the conduct of local affairs was in local hands.

Śreṇīs, guilds, were important and respected bodies. Like other groups they settled their own judicial cases according to their own customs. (*Ācāra*, custom, was recognized as a standard basis for judgment at law after the *Vedas* and the *smṛtis*.) Trading bodies often issued coins. They sometimes acted as trustees when charitable grants were made, the money being deposited with them and the interest being paid regularly to the grantees.³⁴ Since caste, profession and community tended to go together, professional groups such as *śreṇīs* were not formal associations merely but real communities in their own right, bound by birth as well as business. It was possible to call a *gaṇa*, which was a community of *kṣhatriyas*, a *śreṇi* because the word had associations of caste and community. The customs of guilds were to be respected by the king.³⁵ Nārada says that the king should respect their special actions, mode of meeting, and livelihood, but not internal strife or dissension or actions contrary to his own interest.³⁶ This applies to all *vargas*, in which guilds are included. It appears that guilds were an element in the same category as villages and other such groups, where local usage was to prevail.

In the village, it is not likely that state control was so heavy-handed as to be oppressive. State control is to be distinguished from petty tyranny, which is liable to be exercised by any arrogant individual in a position to do so, as might be given by purely hereditary village headship, whether or not a part of the state apparatus. P.V. Kane may be quoted on the subject of village autonomy: 'The central Government did not very much interfere with local administration except in the matter of land revenue and protection against invasion and exercised only general control and supervision. The village communities were miniature states.'³⁷

Respect for local autonomy is not a constitutional provision and nowhere is there real evidence that such autonomy was 'permitted' by a state competent to give it or take it at will, rather than merely observed as part of the order of things. One authority describes village judicial authority as a 'deliberate delegation of power from the central government,'³⁸ but his admission elsewhere that 'even highwaymen and beggars seem to have been organized'³⁹ suggests a different view of communal autonomy. Manu says that a good king is to consider the *dharma* of castes, countries, guilds and families and uphold those not opposed to the Veda.⁴⁰ Nārada on respect for *vargas* has been mentioned

here. Yājñavalkya says that the king is to respect the usage of such groups as guilds, merchants and heretics.⁴¹

It is possible to over-estimate this local autonomy. Whatever respect was due to local customs, when all was said and done it was the king himself who had the final say on what constituted *dharma* in any particular case, and law writers recognized this prerogative. The point about autonomy here is not that kings are likely to have respected the *smṛti* designations of local customs as legally authoritative—for that we need evidence outside the *smṛtis* themselves. The point is that it was considered to be the king's function to protect them and maintain their distinctive characteristics; what matters is that they had autonomous institutions in the first place. In practice it was open to a king to try to infringe that autonomy, just as it was open to him to try to infringe the autonomy of a neighbouring kingdom. But in principle the *vargas* were politically self-sufficient in the same way that the *gaṇas*—themselves reckoned as a type of *varga*—were self-sufficient.

The use of words in the texts is so imprecise that it is difficult to distinguish caste groups from *kṣatriya* guilds, *kṣatriya* guilds from kingless communities, kingless communities from kingdoms with aristocratic oligarchies, and kingdoms with aristocratic oligarchies from kingdoms with influential royal families. These various communities overlapped, included one another, competed with one another, but all had their own traditions of political management—primitive in the small ones, highly structured in the large, and the small ones without *kṣatriyas* looked to those with *kṣatriyas* for protection. Superimposed on this fluid situation was the idea of the unique authority of kingship, as opposed to rule by an elite; but there was room for a community to shift backwards and forwards to some degree on the spectrum without changing its notion of itself in its scheme of categories, as political power within it became more or less centralized with the to-and-fro of *kṣatriya* competition.

NOTES

¹See R.S. Sharma, *op. cit.*, pp. 15, 91; H.K. Deb in the *Indian Historical Quarterly*, vol. 14, pp. 371f.

²A.Ś. 8.2.5–8.

³Cp. B. Schlerath, *op. cit.*, p. 132; J.W. Spellman, *op. cit.*, pp. 66f.

⁴A.Ś. 8.2.5–8.

⁵See K.P. Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity* (Bangalore, 1933), pp. 82–85.

⁶J.W. McCrindle, *The Invasion of India by Alexander the Great* (Westminster, 1896), p. 81.

⁷Mbh. 2.29.8.

⁸Pā. 3.3.86.

⁹A.Ś. 1.17.53.

¹⁰ibid. 9.2.4. etc.

¹¹R. Thapar *op. cit.*, p. 74.

¹²Nār. 10 (*samayasyānapākarma*).

¹³Brh. 17.6.

¹⁴A.Ś. 11.1.2.

¹⁵Pā. 5.3.114.

¹⁶A.Ś. 11.1.4–5.

¹⁷This agrees with the view of B. Prasad, *The State in Ancient India* (Allahabad, 1928), p. 159.

¹⁸A.S. 11.1. 4–5.

¹⁹See T.W. Rhys Davids, *op. cit.*, pp. 19ff.

²⁰C.I.I. 3, p. 8, l. 29.

²¹See above, Chs. 6, 9.

²²Mbh. 12.108.27. Other editions read *Nāśam* instead of *Rājan*, and *gaṇa-bheda-kārakam*.

²³ibid. 12.108.31.

²⁴A.Ś. 1.17.53.

²⁵ibid. 11.1.6ff.

²⁶Mahāparinibbanasutta 4 (Dīg. Nik, vol. 2, pp. 73–5).

²⁷Mbh. 12.108.25.

²⁸Mbh. 12.108.30.

²⁹As seen by K.P. Jayaswal, *op. cit.*, pp. 88f; V.P. Varma in the *J.B.O.R.S.* vol. 38, pp. 65f.

³⁰*Jāt* vol. 4, p. 144 at p. 148; *Gaṇa-rāja-kula*.

³¹*Mahāvastu*, vol. 1, p. 271, lines 15–16.

³²On *vargas* see Kāt 225, 349, 682.

³³Brh. 17.5ff.

³⁴E.I. vol. 8, p. 82 (weavers' guilds).

³⁵Mn. 8.41–42; Yāj 2.192.

³⁷Nār. (*samayasyānapākarma*), 2–5.

³⁷P.V. Kane, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, p. 157; Cp. A.S. Altekar *op. cit.*, p. 104; R. Thapar *op. cit.*, p. 213, offers a different view.

³⁸C. Drekmeier, *op. cit.*, p. 273.

³⁹ibid., p. 277.

⁴⁰Mn. 8.41.

⁴¹Yāj. 2.192.

CHAPTER XIII

CONCLUSION

Several recent studies have concerned themselves specifically with ancient Indian society. A few researchers, such as I. Karve, have been interested in the detail of caste and kinship. Even so, too little is so far known about the social context or the functioning of political institutions, as R. Thapar points out :

The understanding of the functioning of power in India lies in analyses of the caste and sub-caste relationships and of institutions such as the guilds and village councils, and not merely in the survey of dynastic power. Unfortunately, the significance of such studies has only recently been recognised, and it will probably take another decade or two of intensive scholarship before historically valid generalizations can be made. ¹

Many of the questions which most urgently need to be answered by a student of ancient politics must be left open. We simply do not know enough about the operative groups in political life. We do not know enough about the genesis of the caste system or the way in which kinship links developed.

What we have to go on with consists largely of a literature of ideas, ideas that express the way in which people thought about themselves and their society. Like the ideas of any age, they represent a scheme which made sense of the disordered experiences of daily interaction, and which held latent within it a conception of the purposes which unified society and governed the institutions within it. There are three distinct ways that can be identified here in which these ideas may mislead us because they are not historical description. But if they are recognized, if the distortions created by the mirror are understood, then at least the first steps can be taken towards a realistic description of the way things worked.

What Were the Important Groups?

In the first place, they do not necessarily show us what were the actually important groups in political life. Did cliques form, and kings look for support, and local dignitaries seek patronage, and officials find them-

selves appointed or promoted, according to *varṇa* loyalties, sub-caste loyalties, regional loyalties, religious loyalties? Perhaps all these ingredients were mixed, but we would like to know how the mixture could affect particular situations.

The literature is indeed very specific about one type of group classification—the *varṇa* or estates of men. At every point discrimination according to the four estates is detailed. And this style of reference leads the student to think, and write, about ‘the *brāhmaṇas*,’ ‘the *kṣatriyas*,’ as if these groups as such were the functioning units in political life.

But we know from the character of the caste system in modern practice that the four over-arching categories are not the whole system at all but merely a notional ordering of it which serves to establish an overall pattern and a hierarchy into which the significant units, the castes or *jātis*, can be fitted. The overall scheme is a theory; it is only one clue to the practice, and by itself does not tell us much about the rules that actually seem to govern the identity and functioning of the smaller local, occupational and kinship groups within it.

Thus an idea of ‘the *brāhmaṇas*’ and ‘the *kṣatriyas*’ as groups in competition for power—or alternatively hand-in-glove in an élitist conspiracy—is likely to be over-simple. We can imagine that, when a king died or seemed to be losing power, not just the *varṇa* line-up but many cross-cutting loyalties would complicate the pattern of party grouping. A group of *brāhmaṇas* in the palace might throw its weight behind the officially designated *yuvarāja*, for example. A slightly heterodox sect with influence over much of the kingdom might favour the chief queen’s eldest son, who was not the *yuvarāja*. It might be joined by a powerful *kṣatriya* guild that supplied much of the kingdom’s military strength, and which felt its importance to the kingdom was insufficiently recognized by the king and *yuvarāja*. Meanwhile the ruling line of a semi-independent province might stake a claim to the throne on the grounds of marriage links with the royal family, and it might be supported by the *brāhmaṇas* of another province who thought that they had been passed over when endowments to temples were being distributed, and blamed both the palace *brāhmaṇas* and the heterodox sect. The operative unit in political life, it may be suggested here, was, not an all-Indian notional categorization of class, but a faction, a grouping made up of all manner of groups according to various loyalties and the promptings of expediency. The king or claimant, like the head of any faction, might be a front man for powerful palace or religious or local interests, or he might be a dominating figure, expert in the diplomacy of intrigue. Much depended on personalities and individual power situations.

Continuity and Change

In the second place, the value placed on order and constancy in the literature gives an impression of conservatism and changelessness. We have an impression of enormous traditionalism in the history of the inscrutable east, of customs unyielding, ways of life prolonging themselves into an eternal sanctity. There may indeed be a difference of degree between the east and the modern west, but nevertheless this impression is begotten by a literature and an ideology that existed to rationalize the universe into an enduring and meaningful scheme that set out purpose and duty in life for everybody. The impression may be misleading. We know, for example, that there is room for social mobility of a sort even within the caste system of today, never mind how absolutely the rules of the system actually apply in daily life. It is possible for a caste to change its way of life, to adopt new rituals, to make new claims, and in the course of time, by persistence, to have a new status acknowledged in a different *varṇa*. *Esse is percipi*. In the brahmanization of India and the frequent invasions from the north-west there are plenty of possible causes of disruption in ancient social life, which may be masked by a traditionalist ideology.

Degree of Organization

In the third place, the fact that the literature is designed to postulate order and system may give a false impression of the degree of organization of political life. Sources such as the *Arthāśāstra* irresistibly suggest an elaborate political network with an apparatus of totalitarian control working as efficiently as the circuits in a computer. Yet we have only to recall that such ideas are no more than a design for giving effect to a king's *rājadharmā*. What is represented in the design is a well-managed power group with checks to ensure its members' loyalty and an effective espionage system to spy on itself and on the machinations of other groups. These other groups are not self-contained foreign states but factions in contest for tribute from the same area and for the same throne. Enemies are therefore to be feared not just beyond frontiers but in the capital, in the government, in the council chamber, in the kitchen, under the bed, in it. If there were only one faction in India, only one party loyalty, then no doubt the totalitarian state that the *Arthāśāstra* seems to envisage could be realized; but there were innumerable factions, and their energy was largely spent in contest with each other. This is just as likely to have been true in the India of Aśoka as in the India of the Guptas. The conception of a state with its *plenitudo potestatis* is inappropriate here. We are not entitled to say that this or that local institution

was 'permitted' by the central government unless we have positive evidence that the central government sometimes suppressed or disallowed such institutions, because the natural presumption is that in the absence of state constitutions local communities were the units of political life, and governments did not have authority vested in them by constitutions but were grouping of dignitaries clustered around *kṣatriyas*. It is the natural presumption, but it can only be very vague in its outlines; not enough is known about the actual structure of power relations.

NOTES

¹R. Thapar, *A History of India*, vol. 1 (Harmondsworth, 1966), p. 19.

APPENDIX I

SOURCES

Source material is fairly abundant but offers special problems of chronology and interpretation. Dates of most sources are commonly agreed only within very broad limits, inside which differences even of several centuries are possible. More precise dating than the rough chronology outlined here would require detailed analysis. P.V. Kane in his *History of Dharmaśāstra* examines the chronology of the major sources. It is usually possible to assign any given source to a particular general period, but in many cases a great deal of traditional material bearing on the distant past is incorporated. The *Mahābhārata* is notable in this respect. Later interpolations and stratification are common features. Such difficulties introduce a large element of conjecture. A particular problem besetting the study of state authority is the date of the *Arthaśāstra*, which has been a matter of controversy. The authorship of this work is considered in the following appendix.

The date of the Vedas has been much debated in the past and has tended to be shrunk by the debate. Composition of the *Ṛg Veda* began several centuries before 1,000 B.C. and ended by about the ninth century B.C. The tenth and last book appears to be of rather later composition than the rest. The later Vedas, the *Brāhmaṇas* and *Upanisads* come down to about 600 B.C. Yāska's *Nirukta* dates from the last part of the period or a bit later.

Relevant information offered by the Vedic material is scanty but has at least the negative virtue that, in not dealing specifically with political institutions, it does not give an unconsciously biased and distorted account.

Sanskrit sources bearing on the next period are the *sūtra* literature, texts on sacrifices and conventions arising from the Vedic schools in different parts of the land. These are *śrauta*, *grhya* and *dharma sūtras*. It is probable that the composition of the last sort began later than that of the others. They took form from about the sixth to the third or second centuries B.C. Pāṇini's grammar is held to date from the same period, Jaimini's *Mīmāṃsā sūtra* from slightly later. Buddhist literature, the Pali canon, consists of material that started developing in the sixth century B.C. but probably did not congeal into literature until the second

or first. In the process it evolved from a Māgadhi dialect into Pali. Not being bound throughout by prosody like the Vedas it is likely to have been more plastic in the hands of tradition. The most valuable part for the present purpose is the *Jātakas*, a set of stories, said to relate to events during the Buddha's various earlier incarnations. Details about the period from all these sources are not abundant but the outlines are clear. The *sūtras* show the emerging pattern of kingship and the place of *dharma* in society. The *Jātakas* and other Pali sources show Buddhist ideas of government and incidentally the way government worked.

The *Rāmāyaṇa* epic was composed by Vālmiki about 200 B.C., but contains traditional material some of which is known to the *Jātakas* and probably grew during the preceding period. It is extant in three recensions. The *Mahābhārata* epic is much more diffuse. Its historical subject matter goes right back to the Vedic period but is buried in accretions. The didactic passages are likely to have been acquired early in the Christian era. Some books of the work and various additions belong to later centuries. The most concrete information about government that epic literature has to offer is in the *Śānti Parvan* where the ideals of kingship and policy are expounded at length. The epics in general are valuable not only for specific references but for furnishing a background picture. They reveal the sort of assumptions that were made and the sort of standards that prevailed.

Alexander's campaign was recorded, and Megasthenes, who was a Greek ambassador shortly after the invasion, left an account of what he saw. Extant versions of the campaign however are very unsatisfactory. Megasthenes is not available except in summaries and fragmentary reproductions at several removes. It is difficult to tell how objective his original observations were and how intelligently they were repeated. Available sources are the writings of Strabo, Diodorus, Curtius, Pliny and Arrian, who lived between the first century B.C. and the second A.D. They use words to describe Indian institutions that are peculiar to Greek, so that however good their faith distortion is probable. Observations about class divisions evidently reveal not the acknowledged Indian code but empirically known professional or other groups. Yet even such inaccuracies have a special value where they can be identified.

Smṛtis, works dealing largely with law, constitute the chief class of sources for the remainder of the period, but dating is difficult. They were not put together at once but grew over a period of time beforehand. They belong to the Christian era, though earlier dates have been argued in one or two cases. Manu has been attributed to 100–200, Yājñavalkya to 100–300, as also Viṣṇu. Rather later is Kātyāyana, and possibly later

still are Nārada and Bṛhaspati. Some, such as the last named, are not extant in any complete form but can be largely reconstructed from fragments quoted elsewhere. The views of several commentators, though late, are valuable for the interpretation of sources : Medhātithi (about 900) and Kullūka (1150–1300) on Manu, and the Mitākṣarā (1000–1100) and Aparārka (1100–1200) on Yājñavalkya. An early commentary that may be noticed here is that of Śabara on Jaimini (200–500). Defects from which most of these sources suffer are that they are highly theoretical and academic, and represent chiefly the attitudes of *brāhmaṇas*. If allowance is made for this, however, they yield valuable information.

Sanskrit Buddhist works constitute one category of general literature. Āryadeva's *Chatuḥśataka* and Āryaśūra's *Jātakamālā* are from about the third and fourth centuries respectively. Probably to the fourth century belong the drama *Mṛcchakatika*, which shows court life and a trial scene, and the *Pañchatantra*, traditional stories that began to accumulate and were put together later. A Chinese traveller, Fa Hsien, was in India from 405–411 and has left an account which however has only incidental allusions to government.

Prominent authors include notably Kālidāsa who lived in about the early fifth century. Among his works the *Raghuvamśa*, the *Mālavikāgni-mitra*, and the *Vikramorvaśī* give pictures of the ideals of kingship, the abundance of feudatories, and the king's routine. Daṇḍin, Subandhu, and Bāṇa belong to about the seventh century. Dramatic and narrative literature do not in general yield detailed information about political institutions but have passing allusions.

Technical literature on politics includes the *Arthaśāstra* traditionally attributed to Kauṭilya, the *Nītiśataka* of Bhartṛhari (600–700) and the *Nītisāra* of Kāmandaki (400–800). A short *arthaśāstra*, the *Bārhaspatya*, is known, but belongs to a later period (about the twelfth century), though many parts may date from an earlier time. Kauṭilya refers to many authorities that were superseded, and it is clear that there was a great deal of learned discussion of politics. Much of what follows the *Arthaśāstra* is derivative, for that text was standard. This field of literature is naturally valuable but suffers a great deal from its theoretical nature. Kauṭilya quotes an authority who recommended skilled men for ministerial office, and another who refuted this on the ground that such men would not have practical natures. Clearly the qualification referred to was learning. This was the lore of the *brāhmaṇas*, and was not a better training for administration than Confucianism in China, which is a fair analogy. *Dharmaśāstra* generally was academic and pedantic, and it is necessary not to be misled by the detail and omnivalence of provisions

in the texts into the belief that things actually worked as they are there portrayed.

One other class of literary sources is constituted by the *purāṇas*, which again contain much traditional material and can only be said to have taken shape during the middle and latter part of the first millennium A.D. There are many *purāṇas* giving information on all manner of topics including astrology, politics and legendary history but they are so derivative that their intrinsic value is comparatively slight. They draw on the epics and *smṛtis* as well as on each other. A section of the *Matsyapurāṇa*, though partly repeating Manu and the *Śāntiparvan*, has some value. Significant perhaps is the very fact that so much material was not obscure and soon forgotten but widely known, remembered, and judged relevant to the topics that exercised the minds of men.

The relation between inscriptions (and coins) and literary sources a little resembles that between circumstantial and testimonial evidence. More of the truth may be drawn from a witness so long as there is no doubt that he is not lying. But the filtering of the information through another's mind may cause distortion, however good the witness' faith. Similarly literature speaks explicitly about the subject of study but may give a very false impression if different motives, standards and verbal usage are not taken into account. Without the opportunity for the same sort of misinterpretation, coins and inscriptions tell who ruled where and whether vassals and local communities were independent enough to issue their own currency. The doubts about stratification and interpolations, though not eliminated, are very much reduced. Not being intended to convey views and opinions, inscriptions are therefore in some ways more reliable. Much is revealed unwittingly. Ministers and generals making benefactions are seen acting in a lordly way, like barons but not like bureaucrats. Some inscriptions, however, being extended declarations of policy, have the same character for the purpose of interpretation as literature. Such are the edicts of Aśoka, which are intended to propagate the policy of righteousness. Others include many grants, and inscriptions commemorating the deeds of kings. These last need to be treated warily since they reveal claims by flatterers rather than history. Two important ones are those of Jūnāgadh and Hāthīgumphā. An over-confident edition of the second of these was published in 1917 where many specific references were read into it. Unwarranted interpretations have not persisted, but the obscurities and ambiguities lessen its value. Later inscriptions, of the Gupta dynasty, yield information about administration, and in particular the Allahabad pillar inscription gives details about Samudragupta's empire, notably about subject oligarchies or *gaṇas*.

APPENDIX II

THE DATE OF THE ARTHAŚĀSTRA

Though the *Arthaśāstra* was discovered in the early years of this century, no generally accepted date of its authorship has been settled. Certainty has been claimed in some quarters, but the claims do not stand. Yet the work is central for any ancient Indian historical study with a political character, and many statements that have been made about government in different historical periods rest entirely upon the assumption of a particular date for the *Arthaśāstra* (to be referred to here as the AŚ). A large body of literature on political institutions in ancient India has grown up. Much weight has been given in this book to the *Arthaśāstra* as evidence, so a critical assessment of what can be said about the date is necessary.

The date and authorship of the AŚ have been much debated.¹ Full treatment would require a very substantial study. Within a narrow compass, however, something useful can be done to clarify the issues of debate, and this is desirable because of the character of the discussion as it is at present : opinion has congealed into two rival and mutually exclusive schools of thought. No argument will be offered here that professes to establish firmly any new substantive evidence; indeed, within this scope, and previous discussion of the subject being as inclusive as it is, this is not to be expected. Here we are concerned rather with the way in which the evidence should be treated : to notice the chief arguments that have been advanced for an earlier or a later date and suggest that what they succeed in showing does not conflict, and to point out that this leaves the field open for the contention already advanced in some quarters that the text is a late compilation.

The question is whether to assign the work to an earlier date, suggested by the traditional ascription to the Mauryan minister Kauṭilya or Chāṇakya, or alternatively to a later date, as is suggested by certain affinities with *smṛtis* and some references which possibly could not have been made in the earlier period. In the latter case the early centuries of the Christian era have variously been favoured. The absence of any mention of gold coins or *dināras* (the *paṇa* coins referred to are likely to have been silver) or to the *daṇḍanayakas* (officials) common by Gupta times, and the presence of two references to *mahāmātras* (officials, a term

characteristic of earlier times) may be thought to render unlikely a date of composition later than the first century A.D.

Some prominent or recent discussions give weight to the traditional chronology. P.V. Kane pays particular attention to resemblances and apparent borrowing in other literature. The work is held to be long antecedent to Manu. An early date is preferred but not considered certain. F. Wilhelm is concerned with references in the text to other authorities. The conclusions are that authors are often invented for rhetorical purposes (except Bhāradvāja); that schools named are more likely to be authentic; that the *āchāryas* are not always the same people but groups varying with the problem; and that the views attributed to Kauṭilya by name are not inconsistent with those advanced in the text generally. The early date is preferred but it is tentatively suggested that the extant text is perhaps a revision of the original, which had 6,000 *ślokas* according to Daṇḍin. Unattributed verses, of which there are many, would be from the original.

References to the work in other Sanskrit literature attribute it variously to *Viṣṇugupta*, *Chāṇakya* and *Kauṭilya*. The same individual is meant in each case. The *Panchatantra* explicitly identifies Chāṇakya with Viṣṇugupta. Other mentions are made by Kāmandaki, the *Tantrākhyāyika*, Daṇḍin, Bāṇa and the *Purāṇas*.² These contexts are comparatively late and do not obviously help narrow the field.

Four verses in *śloka* metre occur in the text, all at the end of chapters, which refer directly or indirectly to Kauṭilya or Viṣṇugupta :

Sukha-grahaṇa-vijñeyam, tattvārthapada-niścitam Kauṭilyena
kṛtam śāstram vimukta-grantha-vistaram (1.1.19).³

Sarvaśāstrāṇyanukramya prayogam upalabhya ca Kauṭilyena naren-
drārthe śāsanasya vidhiḥ kṛtaḥ (2.10.63).

Yena śāstram ca śāstraṁ ca nandarāja-gata ca bhūḥ Amarṣenod-
dhṛtāny āśu tena śāstram idam kṛtam (15.1.73).

Dr̥ṣṭvā vipratipattim bahudhā śāstreṣu bhāṣyakārānām Svayam eva
Viṣṇuguptaś cakāra sūtraṁ ca bhāṣyam ca (15.1, post-colophon).

These may be rendered :

- (1) Easy to grasp and understand, and exact in substance, meaning and words, this *śāstra* (text), free of the prolixity of (other) works, has been composed by Kauṭilya.
- (2) These rules (for composing) edicts were composed by Kauṭilya, after going through all the *śāstras* and mastering the forms, for the benefit of the king.
- (3) This *śāstra* was composed by him who angrily rescued *śāstra*, arms

and the earth which was possessed by the Nanda king (i.e. composed by Chāṇakya).

- (4) Seeing the multiple errors in the texts of commentators, Viṣṇugupta himself made this *sūtra* and commentary.

Such verses, which come at the end of chapters, as well as the colophons where Kauṭilya is named, are more easily believed to be later interpolations than passages embedded in the text.

The views of Kauṭilya are referred to in the work about eighty times. P.V. Kane and F. Wilhelm point out severally that Medhātithi and Viśvarūpa also cite themselves in their works, and that the views attributed to Kauṭilya within the AŚ do not conflict with those elsewhere in the text (and might thus characterise the same author). The fact that the AŚ mentions Kauṭilya does not prove that it was by somebody other than Kauṭilya.

A great deal of the modern literature on the subject is given to examining identical passages or similarities of view elsewhere in Sanskrit literature. For example, some passages are duplicated in the *Kāmasūtra*.⁴ Some material resembles parts of the *Mahābhārata*, but shows divergences which might be held to suggest that it was written before those parts of the *Mahābhārata* assumed their present form. There are resemblances in the *Jātakas*, in the prescriptions of Aśoka's edicts, in Yājñavalkya, and in Manu. Where there is agreement however it is nowhere clear which is the borrower or whether there is a common source. Nothing conclusive emerges. Some weight may be given to the argument that on judicial matters Yājñavalkya shows a later stage of development.⁵ Yet it is not obvious that this compels us to antedate the *Arthaśāstra* by several centuries.

Nothing conclusive has been said about the style and language. The standard for judgment is not clearly objective, but the AŚ appears to lack both the calculated pithiness of the *sūtra* literature and the abstraction and dense syntax of the later commentaries. It is natural to place it with the earlier *smṛtis*.

Terms used offer more positive material. Both early and late coincidences have been adduced. One authority offers a short list of terms considered common to the AŚ and Aśoka's inscriptions.⁶ *Vracha* is here offered as an equivalent of *vraja*, but in the inscriptional contexts other correspondences make better sense.⁷ In general the other words listed are found also in later sources with the same meanings as in the AŚ. Kauṭilya's *yuktas* are officials paid from the treasury,⁸ not evidently very different from the *yuktas* of later usage.

Inscriptions from later times share Kauṭilya's *saṁāhartṛ* and *saṁni-dhātṛ* which do not occur in the earlier period. Kauṭilya's *corarajjuka* is not the same as Aśoka's *rājukas* or the *cauroddharanikas* of many inscriptions. It is possible that he represents an intermediate stage.

Chīna-paṭṭa, silk, occurs at AS 2.114. If *Chīna* is derived from the name of the Ch'in dynasty which arose in the latter part of the third century B.C., one limit is set for the dating of at least the passage where silk is mentioned. The derivation of *Chīna* though very plausible is not certain. Trade with the Chinese is not known before the second century B.C., but is not proved not to have existed. Coral is mentioned in the AŚ. Though the coral trade is not known from before the first century A.D., various doubts have been raised and no firm conclusion offers itself. *Suruṅga*, a mine, is mentioned at 1.20.2. and elsewhere. The word is evidently derived from the Greek *syrix* which suggests a later date, but it has been maintained that the word was probably acquired during or before the time of Bindusāra.¹⁰ Here again certainty is out of range.

At 3.20.16 a fine is declared for inviting to rites in honour of *devas* and *pitṛs* 'śākyājīvakādīn vṛṣalappravrajītān'. This has been rendered in different ways : 'Buddhists, *Ājīvakas*, *Śūdras* and exiles;' 'monks of low origin such as Buddhists, *Ājīvakas*, etc.;' 'Buddhists, *Ājīvakas* and *Śūdra* ascetics.' If a list of four were meant *ca* or *vā* would be expected. *Vṛṣala* usually meant *Śūdra* in post-Vedic sources. 'Śūdra monks, i.e. Buddhists, *Ājīvakas* etc.' seems the most natural interpretation. It has been suggested that the passage shows authorship at a time before Buddhism had become respectable, but the disqualification that the passage makes is on grounds of social origin rather than religion, and a follower of one belief might well not be allowed to invite followers of others, however respectable. The references to *Ājīvakas* could suggest an early date, but the sect though obscure was known later than the Mauryas.¹¹

The techniques of writing are shown in the AŚ to be highly developed. It has been held that, at the time of Chandragupta Maurya, writing was a comparatively young science and the *Arthaśāstra*'s sophistication would not be expected. The evidence however is largely negative.

More general arguments characterising the outlook of the AŚ and speculating about the climate of philosophy it represents tend to run into difficulties. One proponent of the Mauryan date says that the earlier and later periods had nothing in common, contrasting the AŚ's realism with the stern moralistic *dharma* of later times. A second says that a case might be made for supposing the early period to be gayer, with *artha* and *kāma* more likely to come to the fore, but that in reality the interdependence of *artha* and *dharma* was recognized at all times. A third

points to AŚ 2.27 where actors and performers appear to be held in low esteem,¹² sees a resemblance in the stern puritanism of Aśoka's inscriptions, and contrasts this with the cultured theatre-going Gupta age.¹³

Only imperfect evidence has so far emerged from comparison of the AŚ with Megasthenes, Aśoka, *sūtras*, later inscriptions and *smṛtis*. The absence of references that might be expected from the assumption of a given chronology, or the presence of similarities, is nowhere so striking as to justify confident inferences.

Some other points may be noticed which have been considered relevant. Both the *Mahābhāṣya* writing of the Mauryas and the AŚ refer to the setting up of images to certain gods. At AŚ 4.3. where remedies are declared for various plagues, the first suggested in each case appears more rational, the others more magical, so that the latter may be later interpolations. Aśoka and the AŚ are concerned with bans on killing certain animals, and (it is said) with impressing the population with the king's nearness to the gods. Mauryan culture shows advanced development consistent with the sophistication of the AŚ; the polish on the Aśokan pillars is cited as an example. Kauṭilya's sevenfold *rājya* has been said to be too pedantic for a practising politician, and in refutation it has been said that the doctrine is actually necessary to the *maṇḍala* theory working in practice. The AŚ favours building with bricks; Arrian speaks of cities of wood. (This argument has been advanced in favour of a later date, but would be just as appropriate to the opposite school because bricks would not be specifically recommended if the dangers of wood were not familiar at the time.) Mauryan royal titles are not mentioned in the AŚ. It has been severally claimed and denied that the *Arthaśāstra*'s dating system resembles the Kuṣāṇas'. Megasthenes mentions registration of births and deaths; the *Arthaśāstra* does not. (But it does mention registration of households.) The AŚ has been said to be too encyclopaedic for a busy minister. It does not mention Pāṭaliputra. The name Kauṭilya is pejorative. (This is a much debated point; two spellings are found. It is a *gotra* name.¹⁴) The AŚ mentions the *guṇas* of composition familiar to later *kāvya*, and contains some *Triṣṭubh* stanzas more accurate than the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s. Its knowledge of herbs and alchemy has been described as Graeco-Syriac (suggesting a later period of contact with Hellenic culture).

The nature of the AŚ and the sort of administration for which it was written need to be understood. It consists of recommendations. These are naturally likely to concern practices which in reality were attempted and partly realized. If they were standard already, and required no exertion to realize perfectly, they would be taken for granted and not recommend-

ed specifically. If they were never attempted, this would reflect a state of ideas about government such that they would not be recommended. The AŚ describes what its author thought desirable; Megasthenes describes what he saw. If they date from the same time coincidences are not necessarily to be expected.

Less hopeful as a source of evidence is the nature of the AŚ's kingdom. Some arguments on both sides have drawn attention to the character of the political conditions shown by the text. According to some views, it cannot be Mauryan because it reveals a situation where numerous small states contend, whereas the Mauryan empire was vast and centralized; according to others, it is likely to be Mauryan because it describes a centralized and bureaucratic regime such as the Mauryas are imagined to have had. Yet it is doubtful whether very much can emerge from this line of enquiry. Certain foregoing chapters here have suggested that the text reflects an arena of competing kings, each aiming at the homage and tribute of the others, but that this is entirely consistent with Mauryan India. Any subject would have agreed that Chandragupta or Aśoka was a mighty emperor with great power, but by power he would have meant power to attract homage and tribute, which is a matter of status and moral authority, not power to organize all the political affairs of a huge area. This picture is entirely consistent with the AŚ's *maṇḍala*, which is a circle of manoeuvring governments or kings defined according to their relation to a given one that is described as the would-be conqueror and advised how to succeed. The Mauryas happened to have exceptional success, but that success did not create a new framework of political thought that would make the AŚ's models inappropriate; their centralization rested on personal loyalty, and it was open to any other candidate in the *maṇḍala* to make similar claims.

Equally, it is not apparent that the type of government described by Kauṭilya resembles Chandragupta's rather than that of later times. Advice on the organization of strong rule can be given either to a weak king who remains so or to one who is or becomes strong, and in form the AŚ is a model for the guidance of a king, not an account of an actual administration known to the author. It gives an impression of tight organization, but this is rather the logical development of the doctrine of the king's responsibility for all his subjects' affairs than evidence of knowledge of efficient, integrated and loyal government machines, which did not exist, given the nature of Mauryan empire suggested in these pages as at least possibility, even in Mauryan times. The text might, therefore, as far as this sort of evidence shows, have been composed at any time. Study may show differences between the earlier and later

periods which will help to place the AŚ, but they are not the same political differences which have often been assumed.

A technique often used is to assume one date to be probable and refute the arguments in favour of the other. This can conveniently narrow the field but precludes a positive result. The evidence so far cited here is not decisive. Some is weighty enough to be convincing in the absence of contrary evidence; some is insignificant. The content of the text is consistent with authorship early in the Christian era and raises some questions which must be answered if it is to be assigned to be the fourth B.C. Against this must be set the verses naming and characterizing Kauṭilya, and the references in later literature. What emerges is that there is no necessary incompatibility between the essential claims that Chāṇakya was responsible for the doctrines of the *Arthaśāstra*, and that the text we know is a product of the later time. These do not conflict. The work could have been written late on the basis of earlier teaching or writings. Sanskrit literature being so full of derivative, traditional and stratified material, this possibility is *a priori* strong. Those who favour the early date usually admit the probability of interpolations. A particular passage may be held to be an interpolation if external evidence has already satisfactorily shown that the work as a whole must be of an earlier date than this passage, or if the way in which it appears in the context suggests by itself alien authorship. Both these conditions are lacking in most of the cases adduced in the AŚ. There is nothing to prove that the bulk of the text is not an interpolation. Those who favour a later date usually admit the probability that the work draws on traditional material. The controversy is, therefore, spurious. It is entirely possible that the Mauryan Kauṭilya wrote an *arthaśāstra* and that a later editor re-wrote his work, or compressed it, or compiled a text from the teachings of his school, or compiled a text from miscellaneous writings which thereafter came to be known as the doctrine of Kauṭilya.

The facts supporting this view deserve notice. K.C. Ojha points to the style, which mingles *sūtra* and *bhāṣya* (text and commentary) qualities, suggests that the Viṣṇugupta of the last verse is a redactor claiming to have produced a version of *sūtra* and *bhāṣya* alike, and puts forward the view that the later identification of Viṣṇugupta and Kauṭilya was caused by a confusion of editor and originator, a confusion said to be possibly intended by the verse in question. *Chakāra* can mean either 'wrote originally' or 'redacted.' Fabrications were common only in much later times. The identification may be traceable to the time of a Viṣṇugupta referred to in the *Bṛhatsamhitā* of Varāhamihira, identified with Chāṇakya in the commentary on it.¹⁶

This view is substantially followed by R. Thapar, who, however, adds the suggestion that the extant manuscripts are in fact the original work itself, having been extracted from Viṣṇugupta's compendium, which is held to be much larger and to contain material from various other works.¹⁷ The evidence offered for this is that the last book of the text, which consists of a single chapter summarising the contents, is very short and general, and would be expected to be added to the previous book, unless extracted from a fuller treatment. It implies that the enumeration of divisions in the text,¹⁸ which refers to fifteen *adhikaraṇas*, as well as the last verse, have been imported from Viṣṇugupta's compendium; it also implies that all *adhikaraṇas* should be expected to have even length rather than distinct subject-matter.

On K.C. Ojha's view the original was a *sūtra* work, and became cluttered with inaccurate commentaries, which led Viṣṇugupta to attempt a definitive redaction of *sūtra* and *bhāṣya*. A possible alternative view would rest on the earlier tentative suggestion of F. Wilhelm,¹⁹ who called attention to the fact that the A.S. and the *Daśakumāracarita* say that the A.S. has 6,000 *śloka*s. Thus the original would have been in *śloka* verses, a few hundred of which survive in the present text as the unattributed verses. He mentioned the problem of the unattributed verses as something warranting a special study, distinguishing them from verses that are attributed in the text to specified schools and authorities, and saying that they do not always fit naturally into their contexts.²⁰ This would be entirely consistent with the view that the work is a digest.

However, it is more likely that the word *śloka* has the alternative meaning of a unit of 32 prose syllables as employed in measuring the length of a work. Using carefully framed criteria, D.D. Kosambi has reckoned 4640 syllables, including chapter headings but not colophons.²¹ The shortfall from the stated 6,000 could be due to leakages from the text. T.R. Trautmann follows this interpretation. He points to the improbability that a verse AŚ would be recast in prose yet import the verse stating its (verse) length, and that the *Kāmasūtra*, which states its own length to be 1250 *śloka*s and which quotes the prose AŚ and imitates its form, should similarly be based on a 1250-verse original yet recast in a prose form retaining the statement of its verse length and imitating the prose AŚ; he also reports that F. Wilhelm has since abandoned the view that the AŚ had a metrical original.²²

This consideration of the implications of the view that the text has a composite authorship has so far been limited to the conception of it as a mingling of text and commentary in a new form, but there are reasons for viewing it rather as a symposium than as a digest, a re-writing of various

sources. At the very beginning of the work, we are told that in it various teachings are brought together (1.1.1.). The word used is *samhr̥tya*, which can mean either 'digesting' or 'assembling,' and if we prefer the latter we can see the work as an anthology rather than as a digest, a grouping of sections each of which had a single author. This interpretation is suggested by the most cogent study so far made of the authorship of the AŚ, by T.R. Trautmann,²³ which may come to be regarded as establishing finally the character of the work, whatever other questions about it remain to be cleared up. A summary of its conclusions follows :

After an initial discussion of the various versions of the Chāṇakya legend found in Indian classical accounts, the author outlines the problem of the composition of the AŚ and the nature of the statistical methods which can be used to investigate it. He points to the anomalies of the scheme of chapters and topics in the work, whereby a series of titled topics has been artificially arranged, one, two or three to a chapter, to fit into a round number (150) of chapters according to the pattern referred to in the first chapter (virtually a table of contents) and the last book (a summary), which, along with the *śloka*s that end the chapters, are seen as later additions. Such features suggest a compilation, either of a digest or of an anthology. Some peculiar features (citations of earlier authorities, polemics, cross-references and distinctive expressions) characterise the work generally, but they are not uniformly distributed, and anyway may represent merely a degree of re-working, by an editor, of what is essentially an anthology. A pilot study of the frequency of certain words such as *ca* and *vā* in various passages, differences in frequency being a likely indicator of differences of authorship, shows distinct differences between passages in book 2 on the one hand and books 7 and 9 on the other. Similar tests on a commentary, the *Mahābhāṣya*, however, do not yield clear-cut results since the characteristic style of the author of a commentary is 'contaminated' by the style of the text.

Further tests follow to distinguish the authorship of the various books, using as discriminators the frequencies of words such as *eva*, *evam*, *ca*, *tatra* and *vā*, discovered by preliminary studies to be the most reliable indicators of authorship. A conclusion is that 'The separate authorship of books 2, 3 and 7 is well established. When it comes to grouping the remaining books around those three, the interpretation of the results becomes less obvious.'²⁴

Word frequency is not the only criterion available to a scholar using statistical techniques. Sentence length is another possibility, though subject to particular difficulties caused by Sanskrit punctuation. More reliable is compound length, which as a form of test on the AŚ goes

some way to confirm or amplify previous findings (books 2 and 7 are significantly different; so are 3 and 4; books 7 and 9 seem to have the same author).

T.R. Trautmann then considers the problem of borrowing of passages between Medhātithi, Bhāruchi and the AŚ, and concludes that it is simplest to regard the AŚ as Bhāruchi's source. In his final chapter he suggests about 250 A.D. as the date for the compilation of the AŚ with book 2 dating from the second century and books 3 and 4 perhaps from materially earlier. Problems arise, as possibly with book 7, from the tendency of śāstras to draw on pre-existing stocks of lore, which can make precise dating of a particular passage impossible.

Now, the mere mention of the conclusions offered in T.R. Trautmann's study cannot pretend to convert those who are distrustful of computer techniques. Many questions arise about the validity of the methods used and the reliability of the criteria applied, and these can only be answered by reference to the detail of the study itself. It can only be asserted here that tests of word-frequency and, to a lesser extent, compound length seem indeed to show absence of heterogeneity of authorship within the long books in the AŚ, and heterogeneity of authorship between them, and that at least a presumption that the work is in the nature of an anthology must stand.

NOTES

¹See, for example, D.R. Bhandarkar, ABORI vol. 7, p. 65ff.; B. Breloer, *Kautiliya-Studien*, Bonn 1927; V.R.R. Dikshitar, ABORI vol. 13, p. 326ff; C. Drekmeier, *Kingship and Community in Early India*, Stanford, California, 1962, pp. 190-193; A. Hillebrandt, *Über das Kauṣilya-śāstra und verwandtes*, Breslau 1928; H. Jacobi, IA 1918 p. 157-61, 187-95; 1924 p. 128ff, 141ff; J. Jolly, ZDMG vol. 67, pp. 49ff, vol. 68, pp. 349ff, vol. 69, pp. 369ff; P.V. Kane *History of Dharmasastra*, vol. 1, pp. 85-104; A.B. Keith, *J.R.A.S.* 1916 pp. 130ff; S. Konow, *Kautilya Studies*, No. 1, Oslo 1945; D.D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, pp. 199ff, Bombay 1956; D.D. Kosambi, *J.A.O.S.* 1958, pp. 169ff; J.J. Meyer, *Das Altindische Buch vom Welt und Staatsleben*, introduction (Leipzig 1926); K.A. Nilakantha Sastri, *Age of the Nandas and Mauryas*, pp. 190ff; K.C. Ojha, *I.H.Q.* vol. 28, pp. 265ff; B.K. Sarkar, *I.H.Q.* vol. 11, pp. 328ff; O. Stein, *Megasthenes und Kautilya*, Vienna 1922; R. Thapar, *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas*, appendix I (Oxford 1961); F. Wilhelm, *Politische Polemiken im Staatslehrbuch des Kautilya*, Wiesbaden 1960.

²For references see P.V. Kane, *op. cit.*, p. 87f.

³All A.Ś. references here are to the edition of P. Kangle, Bombay. 1961.

⁴See *J.R.A.S.* for 1916, p. 136 (A.B. Keith).

⁵P.V. Kane, *op. cit.*, p. 95

⁶R. Thapar, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

⁷See *S.O.A.S.B.* vol. 6, p. 547f, where *vrātya* is argued; also *ṛkṣa* is a possibility.

⁸A.Ś. 2.8.3.

⁹See *J.A.O.S.* 1917, p. 98.

¹⁰See D.D. Kosambi, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

¹¹See A.L. Basham, *History and Doctrine of the Ājīvakas*, pp. 161–186 (London, 1951).

¹²2.27 shows that actors and performers were reckoned among the lower ranks of society, without implying puritanism; 2.1.33–5 on work and play would support the case better.

¹³See D. Kosambi, *op. cit.*, p. 201; K.A. Nilakantha Sastri, *op. cit.*, p. 194; R. Thapar, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

¹⁴See *J.A.O.S.* 1958 p. 169f, (D.D. Kosambi).

¹⁵A.Ś. 6.2; cf. *Manu* 7.154–159.

¹⁶*I.H.Q.* 1952, pp. 265–272.

¹⁷*op. cit.*, p. 223.

¹⁸A.Ś. 1.1.18.

¹⁹F. Wilhelm, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

²⁰*ibid.*

²¹*J.A.O.S.* 1958, pp. 171f.

²²T.R. Trautmann, "A Metrical Original for the *Kauṣiṇīya Arthaśāstra*?" in *J.A.O.S.* vol. 89 (1969), pp. 347–349.

²³T.R. Trautmann, *The Structure and Composition of the Kauṣiṇīya Arthaśāstra* (1971), published while this book was in the press.

²⁴*ibid.*

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ABBREVIATIONS

A.B.O.R.I.	Annals of the Bhandarkar Research Institute
A.S.W.I.	Archaeological Survey of Western India
A.Ś.	Arthaśāstra of Kauṭilya
A.V.	Atharva Veda
Ādi. Pur.	Ādi Purāṇa
Agni.	Agni Purāṇa
Ait. Br.	Aitareya Brāhmaṇa
Amara	Amarakośa
Angut. Nik	Anguttara Nikāya
Āp.	Āpastamba Dharmasūtra
Āp. Śr. Sū.	Āpastamba Śrauta Sūtra
Bārḥ.	Bārhaspatyasūtra
Baudh.	Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra
Bhāg. Pur.	Bhāgavata Purāṇa
Bṛh.	Bṛhaspatismṛti
Bṛh. Up.	Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad.
C.I.I.	Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum
Ch. Up.	Chāndogya Upaniṣad
Dīg. Nik.	Dīgha Nikāya
Gaut.	Gautama Dharmasūtra
I.A.	Indian Antiquary
I.H.Q.	Indian Historical Quarterly
Insc.	Inscription, Inscriptions
J.A.O.S.	Journal of the American Oriental Society
J.A.S.B.	Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal
J.B.O.R.S.	Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society
J.I.H.	Journal of Indian History
J.R.A.S.	Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Gt Britain & Ireland
J.R.A.S. (Bombay)	Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society
Jai.	Jaimini's Purvamīmāṃsāsūtra
Jāt.	Jātaka(s)
Kām.	Kāmandakiya Nītisāra
Kāt.	Kātyāyanasmṛti
Maitrī Up.	Maitrī Upaniṣad
Maj. Nik.	Majjhima Nikāya
Mārka. Pur.	Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa
Matsya	Matsya Purāṇa
Mbh.	Mahābhārata
Medh.	Mehātithi (commentary on Manu)
Mit.	Mitākṣarā (commentary on Yājñavalkya)
Mn.	Manusmṛti
Nār.	Nāradaśmṛti

P.E.	Pillar Edict
P.T.S.	Pali Text Society
Pañcaviṃśa Br.	Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa
R.E.	Rock Edict
R.V.	Ṛg Veda
Rag.	Raghuvamśa of Kālidāsa
Rm.	Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmiki
S.O.A.S.B.	Bulletin of the School of Oriental & African Studies, London
S.B.E.	Sacred Books of the East (ed. Max Müller)
Ś. Br.	Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa
Sām. Br.	Sāmavidhāna Brāhmaṇa
Śāṅk. Śr. Sū	Śāṅkhayana Śrautasūtra
Tai. Br.	Taittiriya Brāhmaṇa
Vāj. Sam.	Vājasaneyi Saṁhita
Vaś	Vaśiṣṭha Dharmasūtra
Vi.	Viṣṇu Dharmasūtra
Vi. Pur.	Viṣṇu Purāṇa
Yāj.	Yājñavalkyasmṛti
Z.D.M.G.	Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft

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